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BENJAMIN CONSTANT

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

From a miniature in the possession of M. William de Charrière de Sévery of Lausanne. (About 1787.)

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

HIS PRIVATE LIFE AND HIS CONTRIBUTION
TO THE CAUSE OF LIBERAL GOVERNMENT
IN FRANCE

1767–1830

BY

ELIZABETH W. SCHERMERHORN

WITH A PREFACE BY

FERNAND BALDENSPERGER

PROFESSOR AT THE SORBONNE

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TO THE MEMORY OF

RALPH C. H. CATTERALL

LATE PROFESSOR OF MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY
IN CORNELL UNIVERSITY

UNDER WHOSE INSPIRATION

THIS BOOK WAS BEGUN

PREFACE

THERE is, I think, something like "poetical justice" in the mere fact of the first sympathetic study of Benjamin Constant in English reaching us from the shores of New England, and the best proof of interest shown to a herald of parliamentary institutions, to an analyst of religions, by a biographer whose name is associated with concerns of that kind. Constant had been so often thinking, in the erratic part of his life, of America as a land of experimentation, and possibly of refuge, that his better self could not but have felt pleased at the idea of such an approach.

Owing to a many-sided disposition, partly inherited and partly acquired, the fascination of his character and career lies in a fluctuation of conflicting tendencies. As was said to him by those women who best understood that queer mixture of elements, "All your weakness, all your faults, your indecision, your vacillations —all your little peculiarities, if you lose one particle of it all, I should no longer know you, I should no longer have the same faith, the same delight in you." It is no easy task to make his versatility palatable to modern readers, and to bring out, finally, the lasting significance of Constant's activity in modern affairs: Miss Schermerhorn has succeeded in keeping a just balance between the different sides of her subject.

A child of the eighteenth century, with its subtle trend to face life under all its aspects—and a forerunner of a new world, with a firm belief in social progress and human dignity; a cynic and a libertine, posing at times, without effort, as a worn-out roué—and unable to resist the tears of a *femme sensible*, the innocence of children, even the silent kindness of an animal; a keen observer of the inner working of his own mind—and finding, as it were, in an early attraction for chance-games and in a continuous gambling habit, a sort of desperate way to be more acutely conscious of his vitality; a brilliant conversationalist, confessing even that his political education was received in the salons—and an occasional

hermit delighting in solitude, always ready for the lure of libraries, the solidity of erudition, the asceticism of reference ; an agnostic in moral affairs—and a Calvinist sheathed in righteous prejudice ; eminently French, finally, as Lafayette said, alike in his sentiments and in the nature of his talents—and rooted by birth and education in cosmopolitan circles, where he often felt more at ease than in Paris : such are the main dissonances which still disturb the modern student of his character. No wonder if his contemporaries, from whose investigations they were protected by natural reserve and occasional sarcasm, were somewhat disturbed, both in France and abroad, by such jarring elements. From Goethe, who might have had some key to unlock a psychological puzzle of that kind, to Mme. de Staël, who may have been too imperiously fond of him for real understanding, there is a long series of fragmentary misconstructions of the man and of his true nature, and we feel as if the celebrated and pitiless self-confession offered by *Adolphe* were an immolation, on the altar of inexorable sincerity, of a victim which longs for a better interpretation. As was easy to imagine, the complexity of Constant, from Sainte-Beuve to Maurice Barrès and onward, was part of his success with the nineteenth century, where a subtle progeny, while deciphering his intricate modernism, has developed a similar versatility ; and William James, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, was not the last to help toward an explanation of Benjamin's " alternatives."

But out of the pathetic discordance which remains an object lesson in conflicting tendencies, a real homogeneity appears in Constant's political significance, if one thinks of the life-interest it was his lot to give to certain ideals. " A condottiere of Parliamentarism " : I happened to light upon that formula when I first discussed with Miss Schermerhorn, some years ago in Cambridge (Mass.), the points of view of her study of Constant, and I feel inclined to revert to that condensed definition. Not that Benjamin's silhouette, with his celebrated red curls falling on his neck, his alternation of high and low spirits, his subtilty of mind, could in any way remind us of the martial apparel, the steadiness in brain and body of a sixteenth-century warrior. But look at his fate, at the real significance of his political rôle, even at the main gifts and the most obvious shortcomings of his character, and you will accept the definition.

Very loose were the ties connecting him by instinct with any country, France or Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, and England, as if he had a perfect liberty of choice for what pleased him in

each of them, secretly ready for service, pleasure, relations, even matrimony, in one of them. He did not realize Napoleon's necessity for the French nation, after a Revolution that had to be defended against an offensive return of Feudalism; his eagerness for an immediate display of constitutional liberty made him perfectly unaware of the greatness of the "little Corsican" and naïvely submissive to his adversaries. Even in his young days, when he played the part of a profligate dilettante, when he spent whole nights in endless dialogues with the acute and subtle Mme. de Charrière as a ready match for his own acuteness and subtilty, was he not undergoing a precocious and unconscious schooling in discussion, attention and repartee, making himself ready for the tasks of his mature age? When, at the beginning of the new century, he begins to strike Parisian observers as an interesting figure, they notice in him some traits which have only to wait for a congenial theatre in order to develop into parliamentary mastery. "Always epigrammatic, he discussed the deepest political questions with lucid, concise and forcible logic, his argument tinged with sarcasm. When, with marvellous but subtle skill, he led his adversary into the snare he had laid for him, he left him there confounded and helpless, under the blow of an epigram from which there was no recovery. No one ever understood so well the art of overthrowing an opponent in conversation. . . ."

Just imagine the same qualities, but amplified in a House of Representatives, duly equipped with a great knowledge of history, enthusiastically supported by the hopes of an increasing part of the French people; remember that Constant, a firm opponent of the principle of Force in political affairs, was no less adverse to the encroachments of Theocracy, and drew from his studies and experiences an equal distrust of moral absolutism originating in indiscreet religious beliefs: and you will easily realize how it came that the high-water mark of his destiny was reached under the Restoration, when Constitution, Parliament, and Press were in permanent danger. France had forgotten, under Napoleon, her first apprentice days in political liberty; revolutionary assemblies had been of another, more enthusiastic, more simplified type: now or never was a new *régime* to be attempted. Even with differents creeds, all those who believed in discussion were interested in Constant's advice, in his example, in his knowledge of English and American parliamentarism.

So it came that the elderly sceptic, with his crutch, his old-fashioned hat, with the intimate sadness of an incoherent career

in his heart and a taste of ashes, as it were, still in his mouth, became a leader and a guide. All the youngsters in politics sat at his feet—not in France alone, for it must be remembered that young Cavour was trained in Constant's writings. And when he died in 1830, his funeral bore witness to a well-deserved popularity, just as in 1829 his last, triumphant voyage in Alsace, whose representative he was, had shown the absolute sympathy of that province for a liberal France.

Such are Constant's claims for interest and remembrance in our days: he is an ancestor of political liberty, and a link between French emulation and British advance on that ground; his belief in the autonomy of the *ego* in society ranks him, too, among the casual forerunners of feminism, and his opposition to the "spirit of conquest" among the precursors of a society of nations.

But a question arises: Are not the ascending forces of hope in parliamentarism already spent? Are not disintegrating energies at work, partly in a deviation of the system itself, and partly in growth of opposed tendencies, due to new groupings and fresh inspirations? When Constant died, purely democratic undercurrents had already been felt, and were ready everywhere for organization and manifestation: is there in their increasing importance a natural antagonism to the balance of parties, the slowness of parliamentary work, even to the verbalism of its methods? Countries with Houses of Representatives, after the great war, were often acutely aware of an evident lack of efficiency in legislative bodies and responsible governments. Italy had to resort to the drastic remedy of Fascism in order to make the best of her institutions. Russia went to the extremities of "soldiers' and workmen's soviets," perfectly disdainful of the niceties of legal discussions. Germany has no sincere faith in her Parliament, and dreams of a national organization of labour, where working responsibilities, not political faiths, should be represented, from the young apprentice to the "captain of industry." What does it all mean? and is the whole system, for which Constant struggled, spoke and wrote and suffered, distinctly on the wane? Is he, and the men of the same creed, to be ranked by and by among those "prophets of the past" for whom they had an inexhaustible stock of irony, when attacking privilege in government, royal absolutism, court cabal and aristocratic supremacy?

That some modifications of the representative system will result, in the near future, from new economic aggregations, or even from a keener demand for real and lasting responsibilities, seems

hardly avoidable. Nevertheless—even representing, more or less openly, professional bodies, invested interests, corporations or traditional institutions, instead of mere " electors " without any lasting substance—these possibilities of to-morrow will have to inherit the main lesson of yesterday, and Benjamin's message would not be obsolete for them. Even economic forces, democratic dynamic, will claim a lasting and recognized influence in the community only if they find their expression in ideas (or in ideals !) —and a balance and arbitration between ideas, between the supporters of ideals, can only prevail if tolerance in discussion, respect for minorities, submission to reasonable arguments are not irreconcilable with a widespread habit of mind.

That seems, at least, to remain a part of the unquestioned heritage of the " Western man " in general. Our American author, giving with the aid of a London firm to the English-speaking public an excellent contribution to the history of that heritage in France, has certainly helped a good deal to strengthen the intellectual ties between three countries whose union is necessary for the progress of the world.

FERNAND BALDENSPERGER,

Professor at the Sorbonne, Co-editor of the " Revue de littérature comparée."

INTRODUCTION

ON the 12th day of December 1830, there was a great public funeral in Paris. The crowds of spectators in the streets and the number of people and organizations accompanying the cortège were extraordinary—one of the sensations of a year which was already notable for the Revolution which had put Louis Philippe in the place of Charles X. From nine o'clock in the morning until eleven there were eighty-nine processions in all, crossing the Garden of the Tuileries. At the head floated the tri-coloured flags, inscribed with the motto of the Liberal party, "Liberté et Droit," and with the name of the great Liberal leader who was being carried to his grave amid all this pomp and ceremony. An army of young men, students from the law schools and from the colleges, all the force of journalists who represented the Liberal press, the whole Chamber of Deputies, formed the nucleus of the procession. They were joined at every street corner and at every café by crowds of the bourgeoisie and working people. From the Protestant Church on the rue St. Antoine, the funeral cortège proceeded down the Boulevards, which were draped with black and densely crowded, towards the Cemetery of Père Lachaise. Suddenly it halted. The crowd grew denser. Something had happened to the coffin, which was being carried aloft on the shoulders of a band of young University students, and it was lowered to the ground. The handles had become loosened. Amid the hum of voices, raised in protest or discussion, some one started the cry, "To the Panthéon!" at which a shout of joy went up from the onlookers. There was a dispute, in which the police, aided by the prefect, who offered the palliative of argument and promises, were victorious. The tide of humanity that had impetuously headed for the river was as suddenly diverted in its course, and the procession resumed its orderly and solemn march towards the cemetery.

It was already dark and a fine rain was falling when the gates of Père Lachaise were reached. To the sound of solemn music,

and by the flickering light of torches borne by mounted attendants, the body of the hero who was the object of all this respect and devotion was lowered into the grave that awaited it, near those of two illustrious leaders, Manuel and General Foy. The crowd which had accompanied it faithfully all the way poured into the cemetery and stood patiently in the rain through the long discourses in which the greatest Liberal orators of the Chamber now celebrated the virtues and services to the State of a distinguished deputy, author and publicist. Last of all, Lafayette, the people's idol, spoke of his friend and colleague, in whose honour these last tributes were offered :

" Eminently French alike in his sentiments and in the nature of his talents, master of all the languages equally and of all the literatures of Europe, he united in the highest degree the wisdom of immediate understanding to persistence of study ; to the faculty especially characteristic of the French school, that of rendering abstract ideas clearly, the rare talent of compelling attention to the boldest and sometimes the most austere truths. . . . Love of Liberty, and the need of serving her, always ruled his conduct. To say this is a justice due him, over his grave, by a friend who, less trusting and temperate than he, was nevertheless the confidant of his most intimate thoughts. . . . Our eyes will turn, now he is dead, to the seat which he occupied in the Chamber, just as, during his life, illustrious strangers who were admitted to the sessions of our foremost literary society were astonished to seek there in vain for the distinguished writer who made such graceful and such patriotic use of the French language."

Benjamin Constant, the man who was the object of such eulogies and such honours upon his bier, had been in his lifetime vilified and abused more bitterly than often falls to the lot of any but the prophets who speak unwelcome truths. Born in Switzerland, of aristocratic lineage, a cosmopolitan by education and by travel, he had come to Paris in the train of Madame de Staël in the early days of the Directoire. After a varied career, literary, political and amorous, through the unsettled years of the First Empire, he had returned to France after the Bourbon Restoration, and had taken his place finally as a leader of the Liberal party, during those troubled years of reconstruction when France was struggling to establish the free institutions she had bought at the the expense of so much bloodshed and destruction in the Revolution. To his profound knowledge of the laws of constitutional government and his determined and persistent fight for their recognition in France, the free institutions in that country are to-day greatly

indebted. As with all his talents he just fell short of being a great man, so with all his successes and celebrity he just missed the fame he had greatly desired. Yet no one during that period had so sound an apprehension of the real issues at stake during that period of reconstruction, no one had a clearer vision of the lines upon which a free France must develop and has developed.

Up to the present time, the complete biography of Benjamin Constant has not been written. In Germany, where he passed several periods of his life, Dolmatowsky has made a study of his parliamentary theories; and his love affairs have been narrated by Josef Ettlinger. In English—the language of the country he oftenest cited and most admired for its liberal government—we have only a brief biographical sketch introducing a volume of late letters to him from Madame de Staël, and some extracts from his journals in studies of Madame de Staël by Francis Gribble and by Colonel Haggard. In France, the land of his adoption, portions of his journals and a large number of his letters have been published, not to mention innumerable short reviews of his life and work, and several studies of his political teachings; but it was not until 1909 that M. Gustave Rudler gave us the first volume of a monumental biography, written with that admirable scholarship and exhaustive research which characterize the French student, but covering in its five hundred pages only the first twenty-five years of a life whose interest deepened and multiplied as it matured. We have waited impatiently for the completion of the task so well begun, but the terrible struggles through which his country has just passed have undoubtedly interfered with M. Rudler's work on the final volumes.

The importance of Constant's theory of popular government and of the relations between the individual and the State, merits a much more extended treatment than can be presented here. He had a great admiration for the English constitution and founded his own ideals of constitutional government on some of the English institutions, particularly those of the responsibility of Ministers and of an aristocratic Upper Chamber. He also greatly admired the free institutions of the United States.

Apart from the personal interest of the man, there is much in the narrative of the events and problems of his day, as reflected in his letters and experiences, which appeals to us by its resemblance to the crisis through which we are still passing.

The picture of the events of the French Revolution and of the Restoration presented in his letters, which are repeated so curiously

in the war of 1914, his reflections on the German mind and philosophy, his very modern treatise on the *Spirit of Conquest* (twice reprinted recently in France), and his relations to Alsace while it was part of France, are of special interest to-day. The devastating wars of Napoleon, the Coalitions formed to check the advance of force and militarism, the refugees pouring into hospitable Switzerland, the social unrest, the weariness and longing for peace, the birth-throes of liberty and the belief in the regeneration of the world through suffering, the disappointment and disillusion, the problems of reconstruction—these are some of the more obvious resemblances which make the period especially significant for us to-day. All these great and terrible events are recalled in the lives and letters of several groups of people, some of them still famous, others obscure or forgotten but no less interesting and sympathetic, among whom moves the picturesque and remarkable figure of the celebrated wit, the brilliant orator and publicist, the great apostle of Parliamentary Government in France, Benjamin Constant.

Born in Switzerland, educated in Germany and Scotland, living and working in Paris, with later sojourns in England and Germany, he has been called the first great Cosmopolitan. His friends in those countries were Goethe's circle in Weimar, the Holland House circle in England, and such French celebrities as Lafayette, Bernadotte, Talleyrand, Mme. de Staël, and Mme. Récamier. He was a famous wit and a frequenter of distinguished salons, as well as a publicist and a brilliant writer. His love affairs have been over-emphasized, but they are sufficiently important and unusual to give spice to the narrative of his political career. His life, if properly told, is as interesting as the most absorbing novel.

Whether we study him as a writer and journalist, as a publicist and orator, or as a witty and brilliant man of the world, with a strange and complex but fascinating personality, Constant offers so many interesting points of view that his life should no longer remain unknown to the people whose national life is based on the principles for which he contended, and for the sake of which he acquired a kind of celebrity that most men would prefer to escape.

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Constant's letters to Barante are quoted by the gracious permission of M. le Baron de Barante.

ELIZABETH W. SCHERMERHORN.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,
August 1923.

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THE LIFE OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT

CHAPTER I

CHIEFLY GENEALOGICAL

BENJAMIN HENRI CONSTANT DE REBECQUE was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, on the 25th of October 1767. His father, Louis Arnold Juste, third son of General Samuel Constant, had followed the military traditions of his family and was at the time of Benjamin's birth a captain in the service of the States General of Holland. His mother, Henriette Pauline de Chandieu, also came of a family illustrious in arms, and gave him another military grandfather, whose name he received—Benjamin de Chandieu-Villars, Captain of the *Régiment* de Bottens, who had entered the service of Switzerland from that of France.

Of this shadowy young mother, who passed out of the world about a fortnight after giving birth to her only child, we know very little. Her husband's niece, Rosalie de Constant, has described her as beautiful and of an angelic disposition and as having been in love with Juste Constant—who was sixteen years her senior—for years before she became his wife. Her married life was very brief and perhaps not entirely happy, if we can judge from what is known of her husband's disposition and character. The two following letters, published by a descendant of her sister, shed some light upon her nature, reserved but affectionate, and upon the instinctive dislike her husband inspired among her friends. In the first letter Juste Constant is addressing a friend who at his request had undertaken to ascertain her sentiments towards him :

"I was almost sure that you would get nothing out of Henriette," he writes; "I have already told you she is the most reserved girl I have ever seen. I agree with you that one could not make a better choice, but health is indispensable, and it is certain that mine is so impaired that I could never think of setting up an establishment." (May 1760.)

Later he writes that her feelings toward him are a "real problem." It was more than five years before he solved this problem and married Henriette de Chandieu.

The second letter is from Henriette's sister, Catherine de Sévery, and relates the episode of a luncheon with the newly married Mme. de Constant:

"I showed her a bit of lace which I had bought to trim some undersleeves. She teased me about its being cheap and then presented me with a six-yard piece for a pair of undersleeves in three rows—superb! I did not want to accept it, but was touched by her manner of giving it, something so simple and generous. 'I have three whole pieces of it,' she said; 'M. Constant and I selected it this morning with so much pleasure!' This magnificent gift somehow made my heart heavy. I would have preferred either to accept nothing or to *like Juste Constant better.*" (December 1767.)

A portrait of Henriette, reproduced in a volume of Benjamin's letters, reveals much gentle, wistful charm combined with shy reserve. The resemblance to some of Benjamin's early portraits is striking; the same dreamy, hesitating expression, the same features, framed in a halo of fair hair, under the ample folds of the veil or mantilla in which she is wrapped. We say of them both, sensitive, amiable, a trifle weak and, as to future developments, enigmatical!

"Her death," wrote Rosalie de Constant,[1] in the notebooks where she sketched for a younger brother an interesting gallery of family portraits, "affected all the rest of his [Benjamin's] life. Had she lived, his erratic education and wandering about from country to country with no abiding-place and no attachments, might have been avoided. His education lacked feminine influence." And to this lack of a mother's tenderness and sympathetic understanding, Rosalie attributed many of the errors of his life.

Mme. de Constant died, and Benjamin was born, in the town-house of the Chandieus on rue de Chêne, the site of which is now occupied by the Hôtel Palace; and she was buried in the Cemetery of St. François. Juste Constant was so affected by her death that at the hour of the funeral he was "almost in convulsions," and

[1] Niece of Juste Constant. These notebooks, the so-called *Cahiers Verts*, are now in the possession of Mlle. Lucie Achard of Geneva, who has used portions of them for her biography of Rosalie and kindly allowed the author to make additional extracts from them.

it was necessary to call a physician. The following day the baby Benjamin was presented for baptism by his grandfather Chandieu, his two grandmothers acting as sponsors. The Protestant Church of St. François which was the scene of this ceremony still stands in the middle of the busy Place St. François, with trams rattling past it and a Cook's Tourist Office across the street, but preserving within the bare simplicity and close, musty smell which, no doubt, oppressed the dreary little baptismal party on that sad November day in 1767.

But the little Benjamin, although deprived so early of a mother's care, did not lack for female relatives. On his father's side he had come into a very large and closely united family circle, while among the Chandieus were numerous aunts and great-aunts and a grandmother, and all were very jealous of their rights and duties toward the newcomer. As he was destined to pass a considerable portion of his childhood in the society of these Lausanne relatives, and was to keep up a pretty regular correspondence with some of them throughout his life, and as moreover they were exceptionally interesting people in their day and generation, it is worth while at the outset to spend a little time unravelling the intricacies of relationship and studying family traits, before following Juste Constant in his difficult task of bringing up his motherless boy.

It may have been the moving of atavistic forces within him that made the leader of the opposition party in the French Chamber of Deputies famous as a fighter and ever foremost in the progressive ranks; for not only were his ancestors on both sides conspicuous for military achievements, but both the Constants and the Chandieus had come to Switzerland as Protestant refugees from France.[1] Antoine, seigneur de la Roche-Chandieu (born 1540), was surnamed from his chief dependency, a large domain in Dauphiny, whose mediæval castle is still standing. In Paris, where he was sent to be educated, this Antoine became interested in Protestantism, and coming still more under the influence of Calvin at Geneva, he renounced the study of law, and at twenty became a Protestant clergyman. After suffering imprisonment and persecution in Paris, he took refuge in Switzerland, where he was made a professor in the Academy of Lausanne; but Henry IV. had need of him and called him from his academic life to fulfil important missions and

[1] M. de Charrière de Sévery, in a recent monograph on the family de Charrière de Sévery, traces the Chandieu descent, through the great-grandmother of Benjamin, to Philippe Mornay du Plessis, called "the Protestant Pope."

to serve as camp-chaplain. He was present at the battle of Coutras (1587), and in gratitude for his services the King presented him with a magnificent sapphire ring. He returned to die in Lausanne, although most of his thirteen children remained in France. One son, Esaïe, became the founder of the Swiss branch of the family, and it was his son Charles who, after a brilliant military career under Louis XIV., built the Château de l'Isle, near Cossonay, on the road between Neuchâtel and Lausanne. The mansion, which derived its name from the lake-like broadening of the river Venoge, just at the point where it stands, was very imposing. It was built after plans by Mansard and surrounded by gardens laid out by Le Nôtre in the style of Versailles. Here doubtless our Benjamin played when he went to visit his great-aunts Mlle. Villars and Mme. de Chandieu-Weuillens. His aunt, Mme. de Sévery, who was born there, has left a description of the interior of the house, of its Gobelin tapestries and fine old Spanish leather hangings, of its marquetry furniture, and its organ—a relic of a vanished chapel.

Charles's son Benjamin, whom the historian Gibbon praised for the elegance of his deportment, had several daughters, one of whom, as we have seen, married Juste Constant. The eldest, Catherine, married Salomon de Sévery, who became the intimate friend of Gibbon. The youngest, Antoinette Pauline, married Jean Samuel de Loys. Descendants of both these daughters still live in Lausanne, but the last male of the house of Chandieu was Benjamin's grandfather. One other daughter, Anne, Countess of Nassau, was the favourite sister of Benjamin's mother, and his correspondence with her, covering a period of twenty-five years, is an important source of our knowledge of his private life. His mother died in her arms and she seems to have assumed the charge of him during his infancy. As she was separated *à l'amiable* from her husband, a German count, she made her home with her parents. The early death of her only son, who was about Benjamin's age, intensified her love for her nephew, although in later years she did not always approve of his manners and morals. A woman of great good-sense and business ability, she became his patient *confidente* and adviser, as well as his mentor and critic, during the endless vacillations and complications of his relations with Mme. de Staël. He wrote her interminable letters on the events of the Revolution and on matters of business, and was her debtor in more than one business transaction. Although it may not always be his real self that he shows in his letters to her, it is certainly always the self he really desires to be. He recognized

her faithfulness and sincerity even while he chafed under the severity of her rebuke. To be sure, he had moods when this dear aunt ("*Mon amie* rather than my aunt," he used to tell her), together with all his other relatives and the entire population of Lausanne, bored him unendurably, yet on the whole Benjamin was sincere when he wrote her, almost like a lover :

" It is impossible to unite more than I do, all the sentiments of trust, friendship and gratitude towards you, and even that *abandon* which is the delight of friendship and without which spirits cannot give themselves to each other. It is that which constitutes the charm of our attachment. I feel that, were you a stranger to me, I would seek you out, and I rejoice in the thought that the ties of blood are added to the attraction that draws me to you." (October 1794.)

She died suddenly in May 1814, while he was in Paris, and writing of his approaching return to Switzerland in order to make his home near her in her declining years. Rosalie wrote her brother Charles :

" Benjamin will be greatly afflicted. She loved him very much, but his wandering life pained her. . . . She has been very fair with him in her will, but this legacy will increase his freedom and his cosmopolitan tastes. While she lived she made a centre for him here. Now Paris and the Other Woman will be strongest." [1]

One more member of his mother's family remains to be mentioned —his grandmother Chandieu, *née* Montrond. Although she has the honour of having introduced Voltaire to the *Lettres de Mlle. Aissé*, her portrait shows a woman neither *spirituelle* nor pleasing. A long narrow face, small eyes close together, and a heavy chin are features which agree with her reputation for possessing the Montrond closeness in money matters. In 1788 Samuel de Constant wrote that he perceived that his nephew Benjamin had inherited another trait of his mother's family besides their straight red hair—he had the " Montrond way " in business dealings. Rosalie also admitted that she saw symptoms of this weakness in him : " I know well that he loves money and that he inherits from the Chandieus an inclination to avarice, but he is generous on reflection." Mme. de Chandieu's daughters did not find her an easy person to live with, and the will she made just before her death, in 1777, testified to her distrust of them and of her husband. This will also failed to provide for the little Benjamin, who would

[1] Geneva Archives.

naturally have been entitled to his mother's share in the estate, and his father in great indignation made an unsuccessful attempt to break it. After this, Juste's relations with his wife's family, never any too cordial, became still more strained, until he expressed a fear that his little son would become a stranger to his mother's relatives.

We have traced the Chandieu descent from the Protestant refugee, the favourite of Henry IV., and it is a coincidence that the Constants claim as the founder of their family in Switzerland a Constant de Rebecque from Artois, who had a similar career. He too won the gratitude of Henry IV., for he saved the King's life at the battle of Ivry, and received from him in reward the device of the Constant arms, *In Arduis Constans.* He, also, became later a Protestant clergyman, and fled to Switzerland to escape punishment for having held nocturnal assemblies, and participated in plots to give France a republican government. Both in his political and in his ministerial capacity he gained fame as an orator. All these are interesting facts, in the light of Benjamin's persistently liberal principles, and of his unfailing genius for being on the progressive and unpopular side of every cause ; but the tradition of his French ancestry had a more practical significance for him when, at two distinct periods of his political career, his enemies tried to drive him from office by challenging his right to French citizenship. It was then that, for the first time, he began to climb the family tree, and there was a great commotion among the cousins in Lausanne, and searching of records and unearthing of forgotten traditions, and resurrecting of stern old Huguenots, to testify to Benjamin's legal right to make trouble for the Royalists of France.

The most important member of the Constant family for the little Benjamin was his grandmother. His letters to her, carefully preserved by Rosalie, show that she loomed large on his childish horizon. The *Générale,* as she was commonly called, was a Personage. Her dignity, efficiency, rectitude, and withal, severity, inspired in her small grandson, and in all who knew her, affection tempered by awe and deference. Her granddaughter Rosalie, who passed much time with her in her declining years, thus describes her in the *Cahiers Verts* :

" She had much natural wit, a strong character far above the petty weaknesses of her sex : clever, industrious, thrifty, she did not waste a moment. The houses she built, the trees she planted, will long preserve the memory of her useful life. . . . She had

five children, who were brought up by their father with much severity, in a time when all education was comprised in enforcing obedience."

She passed her summers on one of the several family estates near Lausanne—Beau Soleil, Le Désert, or La Chablière—all beautifully situated and contiguous. Benjamin makes frequent reference to them in his letters. In winter the aristocracy were wont to return to town for greater social opportunities than the storm-bound country roads would allow, and the Générale then occupied an apartment in the fine old rue de Bourg [1] (No. 25), which was the fashionable quarter of Lausanne. This house passed at her death to her eldest son, David d'Hermenches. It is almost the only one of the historic houses on that street which is still standing, and M. de Sévery in his monograph on *Old Houses of the rue de Bourg* has described it as follows :

" The architecture of the Constant mansion is elegant and of a good style, and the façade on the street, with its ornamental water-spouts, presents points of resemblance to that of the Hôtel de Ville, so that it might be asked whether the same architect was not engaged on both buildings. It was formerly adorned with a wide wrought-iron balcony which had to be removed a few years ago on account of its dilapidation. In this house, as in all those on the rue de Bourg, the salons gave on the public street ; it is well known that the feeling for nature was in those days very little developed, and that our ancestors did not value as highly as we do the view of lake and mountains, and preferred the entertainment of a lively street. . . . Gardens and terraces, more or less spacious, filled the space between the house and the city wall, which ran along the road of Derrière-Bourg."

Here the Constant sons gathered in the winter, coming with their families from their country seats, their military posts, or from Geneva, whose climate was more severe than that of Lausanne, and the capacity of the Générale's apartment was sometimes so taxed that she was forced to enlarge it, and even had to lodge the youngest and noisiest grandchildren over a neighbouring shop. Ten years before Benjamin's birth she became a widow. Her husband, General Samuel Constant, a man of high integrity and simple modest tastes, died after a brilliant military career, at the age of eighty (the Constants were a notably long-lived family), and was buried with great pomp in the beautiful Gothic cathedral

[1] The Constant house is the only eighteenth-century house still standing in this once fashionable street, and is now occupied by a co-operative organization.

which crowns the heights of Lausanne. In the open ambulatory which surrounds the graceful elevated choir, his tomb may be seen, adorned with sculptured military emblems and crowned by the baron's coronet. An elaborate Latin inscription celebrates his honours and virtues, and enumerates his titles : " *Dominus in Hermenches et Villars-Mendraez.*" Opposite is the tomb of his second son, Philippe Germain, who died in the same year, and was also a soldier of rare mental endowments, but was " snatched away by an untimely death, lamented by all." M. W. de Sévery has published a charming portrait of this young man, and the sentimental may linger beside his tomb, not only for the sake of that grace and beauty so early lost, but also for the pretty story of his love for a beautiful cousin whom, by the inexorable laws of Berne against the marriage of cousins, he was forced to renounce. In consequence he became a " prey to melancholy " which caused his early death. Little remains of the cathedral as Benjamin knew it, except the choir and the lovely rose window, and a few delicate faded frescoes, but it is pleasant to fancy that the widowed Générale may have brought him there when a little boy on decorous Sunday afternoons, up the long flight of covered steps that leads from the lower town, to gaze reverently upon the sculptured virtues of his forbears ; and that perchance, on some of these solemn expeditions, the embryo duellist may have stolen away to thrill beside the carved effigy near by, of that stern old Otho of Grandsor, who was killed in 1398, in a " judicial duel."

Although we have no testimony that Benjamin ever saw Voltaire, the great man must have been often cited in the family circle, for along with the military tastes of his ancestors, which he passed down to three sons and three grandsons, General Constant had also received a fair share of their scholarly tastes, and the son of the Swiss pastor who had been proud to count Pierre Bayle[1] as his friend, could boast a still more distinguished comrade in the sage of Ferney. Voltaire was in Lausanne several winters, after the famous episode of his parting from Frederick the Great, " experimenting on Swiss residences." A letter from him to the Duc de Choiseul, acknowledging the gift of a relic of St. Francis for his church at Ferney, speaks thus of the Constants :

" General Constant has fought against us like the devil for forty years. His children must fight for us. This noble family belongs to France, since it originated in Aix. They are clearly

[1] The French philosopher of whom it has been said, " His sole passion was for tolerance."

French, and moreover are very agreeable and their women are charming. What do they ask? To be recognized for what they are. There are so many people who want to be what they are not! . . . How refuse the MM. de Constant the quality of gentlemen which they possess and worthily sustain?"

General Constant's sons, also, were intimate with Voltaire. Samuel and d'Hermenches were star actors in the amateur troupe which he had gathered together in Lausanne for the performance of his tragedies at his private theatre; and the beautiful wife of d'Hermenches, who played the principal rôles to his great satisfaction, was the object of his admiration and attentions. In the Château de Belle-Cour at Mézeri, near Lausanne, is a series of interesting decorated panels, attributed to Huber and Dalberg, and executed about 1757, which came originally from the Château d'Hermenches. In one of them appears a group of the Constant family, dressed for a performance of *Zaïre*. The scene celebrates a little trick played upon Voltaire during the performance, when, entranced by the acting of Mme. d'Hermenches, he unconsciously kept moving his chair forward until he was actually upon the stage, and at the supreme moment when the stabbing was to occur, he suddenly found himself seated between Zaïre and Orosmana.

Thus we may be sure that the family traditions of Voltaire, who did not die until 1788, must have played a part in Benjamin's development. Indeed, although he professed to despise his cynicism and mockery, the orator of the Chamber was frequently charged with having a Voltairean style. Moreover, the effect upon the community in which he was brought up, of the residence among them of a man like Voltaire, bringing with him the culture of Berlin and Paris, or at least a desire for them, and an inevitable broadening of standards, could not have been insignificant. It was not mere whim which had brought him for three winters to Lausanne, when driven by the Calvinists from Geneva. In Lausanne he found the social and moral atmosphere as much milder than that of Geneva as was its climate. Here only did he meet that "union of beauty of nature with impressionability of temperament" which he required, and that *summum bonum* of the dramatist, an audience who "burst into tears." For the society of Lausanne had been tempered and enriched by external influences that rendered it more receptive of new ideas than that of Geneva. From the time when the revocation of the Edict of Nantes drove 20,000 refugees into Switzerland, who arrived in Lausanne at

the rate of 2000 a day, down to the emigration which followed the outbreak of the French Revolution, the Vaudois had been renowned for that hospitality to strangers which makes Lausanne still the favourite adopted home of foreigners. Not only were manufactures and all other branches of industry stimulated by the tide of workmen that swept into the country, but socially and intellectually the community benefited by its hospitality, and the Academy of Lausanne attained greater importance from its accessions of students and scholarship. "It is a curious thing," wrote d'Hermenches to Mme. de Charrière in 1766, "this mania which draws rare souls from all corners of Europe into this little hole of a town." And when we add the atmosphere of elegance and breeding brought by the Vaudois officers, who were continually coming and going between their homes and the foreign courts in whose armies they served, it is easy to understand how Lausanne early attained the first place in Switzerland for culture and the amenities of social life.[1] Even though the most direct effects of Voltaire upon this fertile soil lay in the realm of dramatics only, Gibbon, returning there in 1783, after an absence of nineteen years, was impressed by the general uplift and advancement he perceived in Lausanne society in consequence of his residence there.

There was still another link between the Constants and Voltaire besides those already indicated. His property at Geneva, Les Délices, had adjoined that of M. Pictet who soon became his friend. Voltaire, who loved privacy, had built a fence between their lands, which he called *Cache-Pictet*, but which did not hide from him the beauty of his neighbour's daughter, Charlotte. She became his favourite and protégée, and was the fabricator of that famous cap for the great man, which so excited the jealousy of his niece, Mme. Denis. Casting about for a suitable husband for his young friend, Voltaire's choice fell upon General de Constant's second son, Samuel, who was handsome, agreeable, fond of the fair sex, a good actor, and who, not having been a success as a soldier, dabbled a little in literature. Charlotte Pictet married Samuel de Constant, but after a few years she died, leaving her gay and rather neglectful young husband with four small children to provide for. The little flock was sheltered and mothered in an austere and loveless but dutiful fashion by their grandmother Pictet. They made their home with her on her beautiful estate, St. Jean, which

[1] Sainte-Beuve relates that Voltaire reproved his niece for calling General Constant a "gros Suisse," saying that the Swiss of Lausanne differed from those of the *Petits Cantons* more than the Parisians from the Bas-Bretons.

was wonderfully situated on a cliff overlooking the juncture of the Rhone and the Arve, and from there they enjoyed occasional visits to Voltaire, then at Ferney, and were permitted to play with the stuffed leopard in his library and to look at his books and engravings and to kill the May-bugs on his shrubs. One of these children, Rosalie de Constant, has already been several times referred to.

Samuel de Constant possessed a large share of the family traits of restlessness and of inability to settle his life satisfactorily, which also hampered his nephew Benjamin. His devoted daughter, Rosalie, who was a keen judge of character, speaks tenderly of his timidity, his sensitiveness, and his lack of confidence in himself, which prevented him from taking the place in the world to which his friends felt that his talents and tastes entitled him. But he was a gentle and lovable man, and there is in his letters a quiet dignity and a certain wistfulness which incline us to deal indulgently with those mild literary aspirations of his that brought him such small returns either in fame or in something more substantial. Novel-writing was the fad in those days ; every one was eager to get into print and every one seems to have succeeded in doing so, although few of the insipid and sentimental romances which people admired then survived their own generation. Samuel, however, regarded literature as something more than a pastime ; he took his art seriously and believed that his novel *Camille* was a great book. It did, in truth, enjoy a brief celebrity, and was translated into German and English, but it belongs, as its name indicates, to a school of fiction in which Richardson alone has attained lasting fame, and has only an historical interest to-day. An earlier attempt of Samuel's, *Le Mari Sentimental,* had considerable local success, due partly to its reputed introduction of actual character-portraits of Lausanne citizens. Being anonymous, it was long attributed to Benjamin's friend, Mme. de Charrière, who wrote in a similar vein but with more success. Those who were familiar, however, with the secrets of Samuel's domestic life after his second marriage, saw in the story of the gradual disillusion of a man who had believed in wedded bliss, the story of his own disappointment and unhappiness.

Mlle. Gallatin, whom after great deliberation he had selected to be a stepmother to his four children, lacked precisely the qualities essential to that position—another proof of Samuel's poor judgment, or bad luck—but the son she bore him became the idol of the whole family (" the charming Victor," Benjamin always called him), and

it was for him that Rosalie sketched the family portraits to which the biographers of the Constants are so greatly indebted. From his cradle Victor had manifested his destiny for the army, and after escaping almost by miracle from the massacre of the Swiss Guards in August 1792, he made his mark as a soldier in the service of Holland, was made a prisoner at the battle of Jena, and was with Wellington in the Spanish campaign of 1812.

An older son of Samuel's also entered the army and became a captain in the regiment of his uncle Juste (for whom he had been named), but he died in Ghent in 1793, "in the midst of a tempestuous youth." Charles, who was still older, had a successful business career. After starting out as a mere boy in the mercantile business in China, he went to England, married there a Mlle. Achard from Geneva, and returned to his old home with a fortune, in 1810. He bought the old family property of St. Jean, with which his father had been obliged to part, and became a respected and influential citizen of Geneva. In his youth he was more or less intimate with his cousin Benjamin, but they were widely sundered in principles and tastes, and Charles, a man of conventional views and conscious virtues, was by temperament unable to understand or excuse Benjamin's apparent inconsistencies and irregularities. It is amusing to watch in their correspondence the clash of these totally unsympathetic natures, and the elaborate efforts they made to be just to each other.

Of Samuel's two daughters, the youngest, Lisette, was quite as independent of accepted standards as Benjamin himself, but in an entirely different direction. She was the saint of the family, but she deeply offended her relatives by embracing a peculiar religious cult of which more will be said further on, and by insisting on a life of poverty and labour. She was a thoroughly good and unworldly woman, the only unworldly Constant we hear of, and even her sister Rosalie, though repelled by her eccentricities and her mystical views, was forced to admit that Lisette was radiantly happy in her strange mode of life.

In a letter to Rosalie, Charles de Constant wrote in 1820 :

"It has been said that there is an *esprit de famille* which perpetuates itself for a long time. Our family has its own variety of *esprit*. People often speak of the Constant wit, to characterize a certain piquant and graceful originality. I regret that this wit is dying out, for neither you nor I nor Benjamin nor Lisette have a family to whom to bequeath it. Villars,[1] who possesses it quite as

[1] Eldest son of their uncle David d'Hermenches.

much as we, has not lived with his children enough to pass it on to them. Victor has lost it, owing to the kind of life he has led and the difference of his interests. . . . I know no one who has the freshness of your wit, nor who is able to give and take with so much grace."

This Rosalie to whom such a compliment is paid, and who has already been so frequently cited, was the eldest of Samuel's children. Born in 1758, she was nearly ten years Benjamin's senior. Her mother's early death, followed by a sad and repressed childhood, combined with the mortifying short-sightedness and spinal deformity with which she was afflicted, to cut her off from many of the pleasures of other young people; but the effect of this had been to develop in her great originality, keenness of observation, and a certain whimsical turn of wit which, together with a warm and unswerving loyalty to her friends, made her a remarkably interesting woman. Her letters and the journals that she kept for her two brothers and for her cousin and intimate friend Constance d'Arlens,[1]—voluminous, as was the manner of the age to which she belongs—show the scope of her interests and the delicacy of her appreciation, which fitted her to be the lifelong *confidente* of her brother and of her cousin Benjamin. No one suffered as much as she did from Benjamin's weakness and mistakes; no one defended him so hotly or admired him so profoundly. She had sufficient self-restraint to abstain from the disease of her time, novel-writing, and preferred to give herself to botany, a science just beginning to be generally studied, especially in Geneva, which counted some of the most distinguished botanists of the age on the faculty of its university. To the Museum in Lausanne she bequeathed the beautiful herbarium, the gathering and painting of which had been the passion of her life. By her devotion to all that concerned the Constant family, and by the pains she took to preserve all the family traditions, Rosalie was the chain that linked together their widely separated lives.

Although the cosmopolitan Benjamin did not always feel at ease in this circle of relatives whose views and tastes were so much more narrow and conventional than his, and who did not attempt to hide their scandal and disapprobation of his spectacular career, still he never wholly lost interest in the little happenings of their lives, in the marriages and births and gossip of Lausanne. He was half alien to them, in spite of the *Constant esprit*, of which he inherited rather more than his share; his cosmopolitan education,

[1] Daughter of David d'Hermenches.

and especially his long residence in France, gave him a breadth of outlook, an easy moral standard, an apparently flippant attitude toward life, which offended the strict and upright ideals of these excellent Swiss citizens, always so suspicious of *arrières pensées*. The resentment excited by his early expressions of contempt for the government of his native land has survived in Switzerland, and has dimmed the glory of having produced him. The mention of his name to-day calls forth no sympathetic interest among them. The naming of a street in Lausanne after him was the suggestion of a descendant of one of his cousins, and is, so far as the present author can learn, the only memorial to him that Vaud can boast. Yet there was much genuine affection for the land of his fathers hidden under his habitual gibes and jests. Towards the end of his life, when he was worn with the fruitless and exhausting political struggles in which he was engaged, he longed to lay down the burden and seek peace and repose among the scenes of his childhood. He even went so far as to make an offer to the owner of the old Constant estate of La Chablière, long before passed into the possession of strangers. But the habits of a lifetime were hard to renounce, and he was destined to pass away from a world that had offered him so little real enjoyment, not in Switzerland, but in the country for the preservation of whose liberties he had given the best that was in him.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD

(1767–1779)

IN 1804 Benjamin Constant wrote in his *Journal Intime*:[1] 1767

"Up to the age of fourteen, I was the object of my father's great affection. Treated with considerable severity on the one hand, but on the other flattered into excessive vanity, I filled all about me with admiration for my precocious intelligence, and at the same time with dislike of my violent, quarrelsome and disagreeable disposition. I was motherless. They thought me malicious but I was only conceited."

In the *Cahier Rouge*[2] he has narrated his father's struggles and mistakes in trying to educate this difficult and extraordinary child, but the exact date and details of his migrations between Switzerland and Belgium, and of his intercourse with his relatives during the fourteen years preceding his entering the University of Erlangen, are more or less vague. Apparently there was no little rivalry and jealousy between the two grandmothers over the small Benjamin,[3] and petty suspicions arose, particularly of his mother's favourite sister, Mme. de Nassau, who had nursed her in her illness, and who, the Constants feared, might appropriate her

[1] Published, in part, by a grandson of David d'Hermenches, in the *Révue Internationale* in 1887, and reprinted by Dora Meligari in 1895. The original was written in Greek characters. The published portions begin with the year 1804 in Weimar, and end September 15, 1816, when Constant is about to leave for England. The dates assigned in the published version have been shown by M. Gustave Rudler, in a recent article, to have been often conjectural and erroneous.

[2] A MS. autobiography, entitled *Ma Vie jusqu'en 1787*, published by another grandson of David d'Hermenches in the *Révue des Deux Mondes*, 1907. This MS. and that of the *Journal Intime* were obtained by this family from Benjamin's half-brother, Charles.

[3] "Always a precious and frail little object in the family, whom everybody wanted. His grandmother . . . with difficulty induced his father to give him to her sometimes." (Marginal note by Rosalie on MS. eulogy of Benjamin by Coulmann. Geneva Archives.)

1767 clothing and jewellery. Mme. de Sévery, another sister, wrote to her husband, shortly after Mme. de Constant's death :

"Little Benjamin is doing finely. The Générale wanted to take him away from my mother, uncover him and prevent him from taking any medicine, especially a potion which, with God's help, saved his life. My mother declared they might take her life before she would give up what remained of her dear daughter. This created scene after scene—and then all was arranged. Nanette [Mme. de Nassau] sleeps in the baby's room."

The victory was with the Chandieus for the time being, but it is probable that he vibrated between the two families up to the time when his father removed him from them, in order to place him under the charge of Marianne.

The strange history of Marianne, "so singular that there is nothing in the world like it," wrote a relative—is more or less veiled in mystery. She is not even called by her real name, which was not Marianne, but Jeanne Suzanne Magnin (or Marin ?), and the slight knowledge we have of her story is taken from two or three family letters. Charles de Constant wrote Rosalie that her entrance on the scene was occasioned by a discussion about education between Juste and Mlle. Bavois (later Mme. de Charrière de Bavois), in which there was mention of a remarkably intelligent little girl she had seen at Bettens, a village near Lausanne. A very innocent beginning had this curious scandal ! Juste's imagination, or bravado, was roused, and, acting on one of those mad impulses which were for ever getting him into trouble, he set out at once for Bettens and carried off the child in a post-chaise. Notwithstanding that his alleged purpose was to put her at school "in a Catholic country," where he passed her off as his niece, her parents, who were perfectly respectable people, failed to appreciate his benevolent intentions, and came to his mother's house seeking information concerning her situation. The Générale, though scandalized at her son's conduct, was unable to assist them. This was six years before Benjamin's birth. When Juste married, the Chandieus stipulated that Marianne be effaced from his life with such thoroughness that she should never reappear, but the early death of his wife seemed, in his opinion, to have annulled his agreement, and he resumed the connection, whatever it was. In the matter of her education, he had been as good as his word ; Marianne came from her school well instructed in literature and in music, with a practical knowledge of business and of the management of property, and with a "careful and decent religious training." Although

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

From a miniature in the possession of M. William de Charrière de Sévery of Lausanne. (About 1769.)

Charles plainly states that Juste had educated her with the intention 1772
of making her his mistress, the time came when she had opportunities to make a respectable marriage, and in order to hold her, he took Benjamin from his relatives and entrusted him to her care. This was in 1772, when she was twenty.

We can picture the wrath of the outraged Générale, the despair of the Chandieus, and the sinister, triumphant glee of Juste at having successfully brought up this girl in the teeth of their opposition, and in defiance of all conventions, to be the guardian of his only child. But his victory did not end here. Determined to master their prejudices, he instructed Marianne to write regularly to his mother, even if she received no reply, confining herself to mere reports of Benjamin's health and progress ; and he further braved the family disapprobation by establishing Marianne and her young charge with a Pastor Perey at Cornans, near Cossonay, in the neighbourhood of the Château de l'Isle and of the Chandieu great-aunts, who were thus invited to observe the admirable results of Marianne's supervision. That they were duly impressed and convinced appears from the following letter from Mme. de Sévery to Juste, who was with his regiment at Maestricht :

" I am able to give you a very good report of Benjamin. He has been twice to l'Isle. My aunt Villars wrote me that she was very much pleased with him. He is pretty and amiable and lovely. She tells me that she did not spoil him, which I can scarcely believe, knowing how she is with children she is fond of. She adds that it would be impossible to have found a more suitable place for him, and that she hopes that your mind will be at rest about him."

That such an arrangement came to be tolerated at all may seem strange, but this was the eighteenth century, and there were no Children's Societies to bring a charge of improper guardianship. The father's whim was law. In truth, whatever the relation then existing between Juste and the young woman he afterwards married, Benjamin might easily have suffered—did later suffer—from much worse tutelage than that of the sensible and faithful Marianne, who, after all, was not responsible for the curious situation. Juste, for his part, was overjoyed when she accepted the charge, and wrote her :

" You are rendering me a greater service than if you saved my life. . . . They write me on all sides how fortunate I am ; that you take inconceivable care of Benjamin, and that it is not surprising that he has made so great progress. Would that he might have your heart and your character ! "

1772 Although Benjamin refrains from mentioning her as a forerunner of the series of disreputable instructors he has immortalized for us in the *Cahier Rouge*, he cherished throughout his life a certain amount of gratitude and affection for her, notwithstanding the embarrassment he suffered from her relation with his father, a relation of which he lived in ignorance until he was twenty, and the inconvenience of the second family she bore to Juste. As a child he spoke of her as "Bonne Amie," and even in 1813, amidst the vexatious disputes connected with his father's attempts to get the property for her children, he wrote of her with his characteristic fairness:

"She is one who has been led into an unfortunate attitude, by her false situation, but who is superior to her situation."

In the summer of 1772 Juste moved Marianne and the boy to La Maladière, a property connected with his estate, La Chablière, in order that they might be nearer the Générale; and in July of that year, in order to make sure of his prize against all other suitors, he signed a solemn promise of marriage with her. This was afterwards legally ratified, but so secretly that as late as 1800, when they already had two children, Benjamin was uncertain whether it had taken place. In spite of the annoyances attendant upon the existence of two illegitimate children[1] bearing his own name, Benjamin generously acknowledged the comfort they afforded to his father in his old age, and the gratitude due to Marianne for her devotion and patience.

It is probably to the period of her supervision that we may assign the portrait[2] described by Rudler, of "Benjamin painted as a Cherub, on a deep blue sky with grey and pink clouds, hair of reddish blonde, tender blue-grey eyes, delicate rose-leaf skin—a magnificent child with great expressive eyes, finely curving mouth, firmly pressed lips, an air of clear and quick understanding." In the same period we may place his inoculation for small-pox—an important event of which Juste wrote to Mme. de Sévery:

"The little rascal is doing as well as we can desire. He had only forty or fifty pocks and only one on his face. . . . He wanted to have your letter read to him. You know how fond he is of you. He wishes me to tell you that he will give you a hug when he sees you again. We shall return to Maladière; the air there is better for him than in the city, and he can run about more freely."

Juste's military duties at Flushing or at Maestricht, or Bois-le-Duc, necessitated long absences from home which Benjamin was

[1] Charles, born 1784, and Louise, born 1792. Benjamin did not know of their existence until much later.

[2] Frontispiece of Meligari's edition of the *Journal Intime*.

soon to share. At that time the sons of the old Vaudois families 1772
were forced to seek their careers in the employ of foreign governments. Previous to 1798, the various states which now compose the Federation of Switzerland had each a different form of government or political organization. The Canton of Vaud had accepted the Reformation in 1536 and passed from the House of Savoy, to which it had belonged for three hundred years, to the government of Berne, which ranked second among the thirteen Cantons making up the Helvetic body, and comprised one-third of what was then Switzerland. Although at the time the union with Berne was acceptable to the Vaudois, to whom the Reformation stood for political as well as religious freedom, they found themselves treated by their new rulers as a conquered country and excluded from participation in the government. Moreover, the Bernese were an alien race, speaking German, and with manners less polished, and customs quite unlike those of the former subjects of Savoy. The Vaudois aristocracy chafed under the indignities suffered from the Bernese, who behaved as if they were their superiors. "When I survey your country," wrote Gibbon to a Swiss friend, "I behold two nations, distinctly separated by their rights, employments and manners;—the one consisting of three hundred families born to command, the other consisting of one hundred thousand doomed to submission. The former are invested as a body with all the prerogatives of hereditary monarchs, which are the more humiliating to you, their subjects, because they belong to men apparently your equals." The last sentence reveals the real source of the trouble. Under the monarchical rule of Savoy the Vaudois accepted the domination of their superiors; under the theoretical democracy of Berne, which in actual practice was an oligarchy, they were ruled by their theoretical equals with all the arrogance and absolutism of a despot. With their obsequious following of academic and clerical courtiers, the Bernese officials formed an exclusive circle in which the old Vaudois families claimed no part. In consequence, the class to which the Constants belonged, deprived of both political and social influence at home, absented themselves from town as much as possible, and occupied themselves in their country places with hunting, with the culture of the grape, or sought their careers in the service of foreign governments. The relations of Alsace and Prussia parallel in some respects the political situation that had resulted from an attempt to impose German organization upon a people whose traditions and sympathies were wholly French.

Thus, notwithstanding a certain degree of prosperity and progress

1774 that had come to Vaud as a result of the change of government, the Constants, like many others, had been bred in a detestation of the tyranny to which they were subjected, especially since in the army the arrogance and persecution of the Bernese was continually felt in a thousand small but galling annoyances. Benjamin had inherited and cultivated this hatred of "Their Excellencies" and all their works. "I who have always taken a sort of pride in detesting my country," he once wrote Mme. de Charrière; and while he sought *une patrie* in many lands—even dreamed on more than one occasion of coming to America to find it—he never felt that Switzerland could fill that need for him. But the dissatisfaction that was to express itself in Benjamin in tireless efforts for the establishment of a democratic government in France, in his father never assumed any positive form, but spent itself in bitter complaints. And like others of his class, Juste fled from the ennui and humiliation of his position as a subject of Berne, and entered the military service of Holland.

In 1774, when his regiment was stationed near Brussels, he brought his son to that city, and the ties with Benjamin's native land which were then loosened, were destined to grow feebler from that time on.

Now began a series of experiments in education, each coming to a disastrous termination, when Juste, in disgust, would pull up stakes and bear his son off to another place. The *Cahier Rouge* contains Benjamin's impressions, seen through the mist of time, of the whole miserable procession of tutors—unfrocked monks, retired barbers and unsuccessful lawyers—whose corruption can only be paralleled in the narrative of Rousseau's *Confessions*, to which the reminiscences of Benjamin bear a certain resemblance. They begin with M. de la Grange, a profligate Frenchman who boasted of his atheism. He was dismissed when his sins were discovered, and was succeeded by an ex-lawyer named Gobert, who was starting a school over which he placed his mistress in the capacity of housekeeper. With him Benjamin passed more than a year, chiefly engaged in copying the manuscript of a history that Gobert had written, until his father, having been enlightened as to the real situation, removed him and bore him off to Switzerland. In the intervals between tutors the boy was temporarily accommodated with his music-master, where he had no supervision and little to do but to run to a neighbouring library after the scurrilous novels and irreligious books then in vogue. After eight or ten hours a day spent in devouring tons of literature,

mostly bad—from the materialistic philosophy of La Mettrie to 1774
the licentious romances of Crébillon—the child's moral nature as well as his eyes and brain got a twist he could never wholly straighten out, although the vast quantity of facts that he swallowed during this and similar orgies of reading were an inexhaustible source of ready illustration and argument in his subsequent career as an orator and pamphleteer. Brussels was scarcely an ideal city in which to turn loose an impressionable boy of ten, but it was the pleasure resort of the Swiss officers in the Dutch service, and Juste could be with his son more frequently there than in Switzerland.

Meanwhile the boy attained, in the opinion of his admiring relatives, "remarkable proficiency in music"; not only was he able to play "difficult sonatas very creditably on the harpsichord," but he was also a composer. "Between times I am composing an opera, verses and music; it will be fine and I am not afraid of being hissed," he wrote. "When there is a good play or a new one I go to the Comédie." But this talent seems to have been wholly neglected after he reached manhood. When he was in Brunswick he wrote of having a harpsichord in his room, but after that time there is no indication of special interest in music. A portrait[1] of him at the age of six, in pastels, done by Piot, represents him leaning on a harpsichord, and pointing with a smile that is half mocking, half complacent, to a sheet of music—possibly the score of that "opera" of which he wrote to his grandmother. Rumours of his virtuosity had reached Lausanne and caused his aunt, Mme. de Sévery, some pangs of jealousy, for apparently her little Wilhelm was not winning laurels in that field. "Truly," she wrote one of the great-aunts who had praised Benjamin's attainments,

"I would never want my boy to be a musician! It takes too much time; but with Benjamin's genius one can do anything. It is scarcely possible to be more conceited than he is. *'Zou-Zou, I will humble your pride!'* That, I think, is the difficult problem in his case and one at which his father makes but a poor attempt. He is amusing and charming—for those who do not bring him up nor have to be responsible for his present and future. What an extraordinary young person he is! I think that he will require an extraordinary education as well."

And he certainly received it, although it was not the one she probably had in mind. The following prim little letter from this

[1] Property of Mlle. de Lessert of Lausanne, and used as frontispiece in Rudler's *La Jeunesse de B. C.*

1774 extraordinary young person, addressed to Wilhelm de Sévery,[1] who was his playmate during his brief visits to Switzerland, testifies to his progress in the classics:

"My dear Cousin Wilhelm,—I am told that this is your birthday. I have no bouquet to send you. I have only my good wishes to offer you, and I am sure that they will be granted, for even if you did not deserve to be happy, you nevertheless would be so, with such a good and tender mother, whose son I would like to be. Love me a little, my dear cousin, and come here sometimes to play Puss-in-corner with me. I enjoy myself only when I am with you.

"I leave you, to do my Latin, *vale et me ama.*

"Binjamin."

His introduction to the classics had been at the age of five, under the supervision of a German tutor named Stroelin, whose method of discipline was to beat him first, and then to overwhelm him with caresses, so that he should not complain to his father. As a teacher also this Stroelin exhibited great ingenuity in the art of covering thorns with roses. He lured his pupil along the painful path of Greek by proposing that they should invent together a language which none but themselves should understand. "We made an alphabet first, in which he introduced the Greek characters. Then we began a dictionary, in which every French word was translated by a Greek word."

The child's letters to his grandmother, although somewhat pervaded by the atmosphere of the schoolroom, enjoyed great celebrity in the Constant family.[2] They were passed about from one to another and read with amusement and astonishment. After his death his cousin Charles published one of them in the *Révue Nationale*, and Benjamin's widow, reading it there for the first time, wrote Rosalie:

"What a charming letter from him my cousin has published in the *Nationale*! How his whole character appears in it! You can see him, foresee what he will be, what he has been. What naïveté, abandon, esprit, *bonne infantine*! Already he longs to be understood, to be loved!"

[1] Son of Catherine de Chandieu and Salomon de Sévery. He was a protégé of Gibbon, who bequeathed his library to him. "Mediocrity without pretension, and with a certain amount of graciousness," Benjamin wrote in his journal after dining with him in 1807.

[2] Bequeathed to the Geneva Public Library together with a large number of family letters, by Charles de Constant, brother of Rosalie. Most of Benjamin's letters in this collection have been published by Menos and by Rudler. The missing dates of many of the 399 letters have been supplied by a former librarian, M. Dufour.

The earliest of these letters was written in 1774 or 1775, probably from Brussels: 1775–6

"My dear Grandmamma,—I hope you still remember a little being who loves you very much, and to whom you showed kindness during his stay at Lausanne, which was very short. I have passed my happiest moments with you. I would like to be there now. That time seems like a dream, but the awakening is not so pleasant as when I was with you. When I see you again, dear Grandmamma, I shall appear much better, and you will find a little more reasonableness and order in my ideas. If I consulted my heart only, I would desire no knowledge except how to make you happy. . . . I have resumed my occupations, and am going on here just as if I had never been away. I begged Papa to allow me the pleasure of writing to you. He will soon give you news of us. I adore you and kneel at your feet."

Here we have in embryo the very style of the future prince of letter-writers, and the beginning of those ever-to-be-renewed but never-realized vows to *arranger la vie*. It is seldom that a child of seven reveals so completely the pattern of the coming man. The next letter, written in September of the following year, alludes to the departure of the second tutor, M. de la Grange, who had fallen into disrepute:

"My affairs go much better now that Papa directs them, for I was neglecting them under M. de la Grange. Although I have much less leisure since Papa's return, I make better progress. I would like to give you an outline of my occupations. When I awake I lift my heart to God. I rise at seven, I breakfast, with fruit, with a good relish. I translate a little theme from French into Latin, I learn my lessons, I practise on the harpsichord, I read Roman history and Homer, which pleases me greatly, especially Homer, because, while he amuses me, he gives me lofty ideas. He is the father of the religion of the ancients. After this I play various games, among them ball, in the garden until noon, when my tutor comes to review what I have done in the morning. We dine at one and are very gay. We talk of different things, pleasant, instructive, useful, interesting, and we often speak of you. Half an hour after dinner we translate a theme from Latin into French, and then we go for a walk in the Park. If you should return there you would find it much altered. They are making splendid paths; it is going to be much prettier but not so pleasant.

"Thence we go at half-past four to my music-teacher's. I finish my lessons at six and stay until seven with the young ladies, who are very agreeable. They are very fond of me. I return to the house where I find my Latin teacher with Pliny, Seneca, Cicero, and others. At eight o'clock I part from this good society, have supper

1779 and go to bed. I was forgetting one part of my life—the *goûter*, and the play twice a week. M. de la Grange has gone, Papa has taken his place, which my giddiness makes rather painful; for I have the best intentions in the world but I do not always perform them."

Benjamin has described Duplessis, the tutor who succeeded Gobert, and who remained with him over a year, as "an unfrocked monk, of feeble character but good and intelligent." He afterwards became the tutor of the Comte d'Aumale, and fell in love with his sister, who was of easy moral standards. He ended, as so many of Benjamin's early associates seem to have done, by going mad and blowing out his brains. Juste indiscreetly displayed his contempt for Duplessis before his son, but the boy certainly made progress under him. His letters show greater spontaneity; he is developing that humour, and grace and ease which have made him celebrated as a letter-writer.

"I had, my dear grandmama, lost all hope. I thought you no longer remembered me and that you no longer loved me. Your kind letter has come to dispel my unhappiness, for your silence had caused me to lose all enjoyment, because in everything I do my aim is to please you, and since you no longer remembered me, it was useless to apply myself. It must be my cousins who are supplanting me in your love. They are colonels and captains while I—I am nobody, and yet I love and cherish you as much as they. . . .

"I wish my blood could be prevented from circulating so rapidly and given a more regular pace. I have tried if music would have this effect and I am playing *adagios* and *largos* enough to put fifty cardinals to sleep. The first measures go well but—I do not know what magic it is—these slow airs end by becoming *prestissimi*. It is the same with dancing. The minuet winds up with me in some sort of jig. Do you know, my dear Grandmama, that I go in society twice a week? I wear a beautiful coat, a sword, my hat under my arm, one hand in my breast, the other on my hip. I observe. I listen. So far I do not covet the pleasures of the great world. They all seem not to be having a very good time. However, the gambling and the gold that I see rolling out give me some sensations. I would like to win some for a thousand little wants, which are treated as nonsense. Speaking of gold, I took good care of the three *louis* you sent me last year. They held out until the last Fair. At present I need only a frock and a beard to belong to the order of St. Francis. It is not so bad. I have fewer needs when I have no money. I am awaiting the King's birthday impatiently. They will begin dancing every Friday at the Prime Minister's. In spite of all the pleasures I am anticipating, I would prefer to spend a few moments with you, my dear Grand-

mama. That pleasure is of the heart, it makes me happy, it is 1777–9
of benefit to me. The others do not pass beyond the eyes and the ears, and leave a void that I do not feel when I have been with you.

"I do not know when I shall enjoy that pleasure. My tasks are so well arranged that they do not want to interrupt them." (Brussels, November 19, 1779.)

This is the letter in which Charlotte saw her husband "in miniature" when she read it in the *Révue Nationale.*

Its authenticity was challenged by Sainte-Beuve and others, when it was reprinted by Vinet in his *Chrestomathie.* Even did the original not exist among the family papers at Geneva, the internal evidence of its style and spirit is unmistakable. The dislike of courts and society, the lure of the gaming table, the jealousy of his cousins, the holding of himself up to ridicule, the half-playful tone of affection, the egotistic craving for love, the fitful yearnings for domesticity, the grace and lightness of touch—all these traits foreshadow the Benjamin of the mature correspondence. Already we feel the strange, sensitive, delicately-organized being, destined to be the wit and life of select circles, the brilliant and ironical orator, the unstable lover of distinguished women.

It is impossible to read the affectionate letters of Benjamin to his grandmother—with their record of endless studies, of solitary days without childish amusements or playmates, with no antidote or outlet for his curious temperament—without being moved to sympathy and indulgence. An abnormal child, living an abnormal life, passed from one unscrupulous tutor to another, with tempestuous intervals of parental supervision, it was natural that his childish imagination should attach itself half-wistfully, half-jealously, to the memories of his brief sojourns with her in Switzerland.

"I sometimes see a young English girl whom I prefer to Cicero and Seneca, who teaches Ovid without having read or heard of him, with her eyes. I have written a little story for her, of which I am sending you the first pages. If you like it you shall have the rest. I would like to see all the pretty things you have been doing to *le désert,* and to run about in the woods with you, my favourite spot would certainly be *le mangéron.* The name makes me hungry and you know I am a gourmand. Next I would go and dream in *Belle ombre.* But what I would like still better would be to weave daydreams with you. That is what I remember best, because it was most to my taste. Of my life and occupations I will only say that the first is mingled with joy and pain, and that the others sometimes go well, sometimes badly, but nevertheless I give satisfaction. . . ." (Bruxelles, 24 December 1777.)

1779 " I am very sorry that circumstances have obliged Papa to have me educated so far from you. I wish I never had to leave you and that I might give you all the care I am capable of. I would like to read with you, dream with you, walk with you . . . you would be the object of all I did. You would correct me and you would form my style and taste, in my more serious moments I would read you many things, you would make many reflections and you would improve my understanding. . . ." (Bruxelles, August 17, 1779.)

It is difficult to see in the Benjamin of these remarkable letters, the " little monster of hypocrisy and precocity " that Sainte-Beuve, always so prejudiced and severe in his judgments of him, represents him as being. Nor is it fair to read the child's heart in the light thrown upon the mature man by his private journals and letters. We cannot brand him as a hypocrite because the affectionate protestations of his letters were sometimes contradicted in moods of petulance or impatience. This would be to miss the real secret of his nature, with its delicate sense of fitness, its deep yearning for affection, its " best intentions in the world." Precocious, certainly, as was to be expected, with the hothouse education he received ; spoiled and selfish he would naturally be, and egocentric without doubt, but not a hypocrite ; only a lonely, quaint little old man of a child—eager to please and to be loved. At ten, he had mastered Cicero, Seneca, Pliny and Homer ; was proficient in music and dancing, and had acquired a literary taste of wide and indiscreet range, but he had no experience of home life, except such as he found in rented lodgings with tutors ; he knew nothing of the tenderness of parental love, except what he received from an ambitious, reserved father, whose sole interest was centered in his education. Charlotte understood the child of these letters perfectly : " Already he longs to be understood, to be loved."

There was clearly a close sympathy between the Générale and her odd, introspective little grandson, whose rare moments of real childhood had been passed with her. The group of splendid lindens still stands at La Chablière, where, with the soft undulations of the Jura before them, and Lake Geneva sparkling far away to the left, these two companions were wont to sit and " weave day-dreams." To this spot Benjamin came back, a lame old man, leaning on his crutches and attended by the faithful Charlotte, on his last visit to Lausanne ; and here he expressed a wish to be buried, so precious were the memories that the beauty of the spot evoked.

Benjamin had, of course, seen his Geneva cousins many times, and in 1778 Charles de Constant, returning from England to make

his first communion in Geneva, had stopped a fortnight in Brussels, 1779
when the two lads had enjoyed together the sights and amusements of that lively city. But the first meeting with Rosalie of which we have an account is in the spring of 1779, when Benjamin, " tall, lean, pale, with locks that rival those of Apollo " (to quote from a portrait he drew of himself for his aunt), rode over to visit his cousins on his little pony. " One fine day," wrote Rosalie in her journal, " we saw Benjamin coming in on a little horse belonging to his father. He was twelve years old, tall, but a real child." His gaiety, she adds, was *plein de sel.* Thirteen years afterwards Rosalie recalled in the *Cahiers Verts* their mirth over the attempts of Victor's tutor to keep his seat on the pony, which put them all in a merry mood for the whole day. In the evening they all joined in the popular amusement of the day, making *Chansons* and *Bouts Rimés*, which Rosalie found years after at the bottom of her chest of mementoes. Benjamin was the life of the company and in " fine form " she recalled, and in fulfilment of a promise to her sat up most of the night composing playful verses which he threw in at her window and which she kept—verses about the loves of Paris and Elvire, that were not bad for a boy of twelve.

The youthful compositions of Benjamin which are in the collection at Geneva are evidently schoolroom productions, suggested by his studies, and although regarded with pride by his loving family, have no special merit. An unfinished dialogue, *Frugalité et Bombance*, in the style of Juvenal ; two fragments of scenes, amorous in nature, from a " tragedy " called *Dido* ; a moral meditation on the delusiveness of fortune and the importance of self-knowledge ; and a long rhetorical poem, *Le Dévouement de Décius*, based on Livy's version of the story, comprise a collection whose chief merit lies in the power of assimilation and reproduction, and the wide acquaintance with classical and romantic literature revealed—qualities that later stood Benjamin in good stead in the *Tribune*, where the readiness of his allusions and the extent of his learning were wont to astonish his hearers.

One other composition, *Les Chevaliers*, more ambitious in proportions, is a heroic romance, celebrating the wars of Pepin and his knights. M. Rudler, who has read it in a richly bound manuscript (in the d'Estournelles de Constant archives), says that he would sell the first four cantos cheap, but that the last, which is on dreams, shows considerable taste and originality, and a surprising grasp of philosophical questions. Traces of the famous " Constantine irony " are not lacking, while in understanding of the weaknesses

1779 and ambitions of men, and insensibility to the charms of nature or poetical imagery, and in fondness for the burlesque, the bizarre, especially in the proper names of his heroes, we seem to perceive the germ of his later heroic satire, *Le Siège de Soissons*. *Les Chevaliers* is dedicated to his father in the following characteristically ironical lines :

" To M. Juste Constant,
" Dear Author of my Days,
" They say that fathers think their sons' compositions excellent, although they are often merely a mass of recollections, combined without art. To show the falseness of this report, I have the honour to present this work to you, very sure that, although I composed it for you, you will not think it good, and that you will not even have the patience to read it." [1]

Among the papers in the Geneva collection is an exercise, apparently written by Benjamin and Rosalie from memory, or expanded from a theme which had been read to them. Their versions are placed in parallel columns and the same phrases occur in both, but it is in the differences that the interest lies, for they are typical of the mental and moral attitude of the two cousins throughout their lives.[2]

Benjamin.	Rosalie.
Chacun sait qu'une heure l'attend qui le délivrera de l'angoisse plus ou moins longue avant le dernier repos ; et s'il aime quelque chose ou quelqu'un, cette heure le délivrera de la peine de n'être pas après aimé.	Chacun sait qu'une heure l'attend qui le séparera de tout ce qu'il a vu et qu'il aime ; et s'il aime quelqu'un ou quelquechose, de la peine de n'être pas aimé.[3]

This is a melancholy theme for the contemplation of the youthful mind, but one that occupied Benjamin much from very early years. In the development of the thought Rosalie sets forth the " tender farewells " and the glorious hope of a life after death, passing over the " anguish " and " convulsions " and " griefs " that hold the

[1] From Rudler. A copy in the Geneva Archives has some slight variations.

[2] Benjamin wrote his aunt (February 1, 1795) : " The thought of death never leaves me. It weighs upon my life, it smites all my projects like a thunderbolt. . . . It is not the fear of death that I experience, but a detachment from life."

[3]

Benjamin.	Rosalie.
Every one knows that an hour awaits him which will free him from the agonies more or less prolonged before the last repose and, if he loves some one or something, from the pain of being no longer loved.	Every one knows that an hour awaits him which will separate him from all he has seen and loves and, if he loves some one, or something, from the pain of not being loved.

imagination of her young cousin; but Benjamin dwells on the 1779
hopelessness of death and the ease with which the departed are forgotten. "We tread so lightly over graves and it seems as if we can never enter this thick night. The earth opens a little and is silent; silently it closes and its surface, becoming again smooth, leaves our questions without answer and our regrets without consolation." The horror and hopelessness of death was a thought that haunted Benjamin to the end. His father's agnosticism and pessimism, the materialistic philosophy he absorbed from his reading during the impressionable years of his life, left their stamp on his sensitive mind, and it is interesting to see how early these ideas asserted themselves.

For the mistakes Juste made in the education of his son he was not entirely to blame, for the quality of the men he employed as tutors is partly typical of the educational conditions in that age, and though deplorable is not exceptional. He was, however, a bad guardian for a precocious and sensitive child. A violent, suspicious, ill-regulated man, he cast a sinister shadow over Benjamin's entire life. The complete absence of sympathy between them is recounted in the opening pages of Benjamin's autobiographical novel, *Adolphe*.

"His conduct was noble and generous, rather than tender" [the hero writes, in analysing his father's influence upon him]. "I was impressed with his right to my gratitude and my respect, but no confidence ever existed between us. He had in his spirit a sort of irony, that suited ill with my character. . . . I found in my father, not a censor, but a caustic and cold observer, who smiled in pity and soon ended the conversation with impatience. I do not remember, during my early years, ever having an hour's interview with him. His letters were affectionate, full of reasonable and sensible advice, but reacted upon me painfully. . . . My constraint with him had a marked effect upon my character. As shy as he, but more sensitive, because I was younger, I ended in shutting up all my emotions within myself . . . and I contracted the habit of enlivening [*my conversation*] by a perpetual bantering which rendered it easier for me and helped me to cover up my real thoughts."

Here we find one cause of that habit of insincerity and perpetual trifling which was the peculiarity of Benjamin's conversation. But the father's influence was more than repressive.

"Although he observed strictly the outward conventionalities" [the author of *Adolphe* continues], "he quite frequently indulged in light discourse on love-liaisons; he regarded them as pastimes—if not legitimate, at least excusable, and considered marriage alone as a serious matter."

1779 In his youth Juste de Constant had passed for a man of exceptional talents and was regarded as a fine *parti* for Henriette de Chandieu. He was handsome, witty, of imposing presence, agreeable when he chose to be : he could, says Rosalie, " play the conqueror magnificently." He had much of the same originality, impulsiveness and picturesqueness that made Benjamin's peculiar charm. His military record, up to middle life, had been distinguished by gallantry and courage. Entering his father's regiment as a cadet, at ten years of age, he had risen by the time he was twenty-eight to a captain's rank, and had bought his company. At the time of his disgrace, in 1783, he was commanding colonel, had taken part in the campaign of the Rhine, been all through the war, and been wounded at Fontenoy. But his distrustful, secretive and caustic temper made enemies for him in the places where he most needed friends, while his fatal and habitual indecision, and lack of consistent principles and ideals, prevented him from adhering to any course firmly enough to surmount obstacles. " A remarkable example of human inconsistency and of the misfortunes that result from it," his niece calls him. He was cursed, it appears, with some of the undesirable family traits which were as much of a tradition as the " Montrond style " that Samuel feared he had detected in Benjamin. " The humour that has devoured our family," is a phrase that occurs more than once in the Constant letters. In 1805 Charles wrote his sister : " There is in our blood a restlessness that has harmed many of us and has done nothing to promote our happiness. The present generation has less of it, except perhaps poor Benjamin."

Juste's ambitions for his son were directed only to material success, and would seem to have followed the maxims of " Milord Chesterfield." Detestation of mediocrity was the gospel he preached, but he neglected to build the brilliant future he mapped out for his son on a foundation of positive moral convictions. Having himself no fixed principles, he did not recognize their usefulness in avoiding that mediocrity he so greatly scorned. The man who, in the words of his own son, " waywardly persisted in walking on one side and looking on the other," and never discovered why it was that his own brilliant promise had ended in miserable failure, could not be expected to be either wise or firm in preparing his child, heir of many of his faults, for the splendid achievements for which he destined him.

CHAPTER III

ADOLESCENCE

(1780–1787)

BENJAMIN had now arrived at the period of adolescence. 1780
His restlessness, his impatience of control, his sensitiveness to every suggestion of good or evil, at this critical epoch, rendered the difficulties of Juste's task increasingly perplexing. It was impossible to keep him cloistered with a tutor any longer; the great world, typified by the gaieties and temptations of Brussels, was at his door. The eternal feminine was beginning to complicate the problem, and Benjamin had already shown himself precociously susceptible to the fair sex. Juste met the issue in his usual impulsive, ill-advised manner, and after the dismissal of Duplessis started off with his son for Oxford. Being an admirer of English institutions he was ambitious that the boy should have an English education, but apparently he had neglected to inquire into the requirements of English universities. He must soon have discovered that this thirteen-year-old lad was not ready for Oxford; at any rate, there is no record of Benjamin's matriculation at that university. Little is known of their trip except that Benjamin remained in England two months, during which he probably studied the language, and that he returned with an English tutor, Mr. May, who shortly became as ridiculous and insupportable in Juste's estimation as the unfortunate Duplessis. But May survived, an object of derision, for a year and a half. In September (1780) Mme. de Sévery wrote to her son:

"M. Constant has arrived with Benjamin; behold the English education finished already! The father came here yesterday. He is so English he would kill you. He has a wig on top of his hair like that of M. de Créjat."

The English education continued, however, at Gertruidenberg, a dull little fortified town in that part of Flanders known as the

1780 *Bresbosch,* or *inundated tract,* where Juste's regiment was stationed. Here under the tutelage of Mr. May, Benjamin spent the winter—"badly lodged and badly nourished," as he wrote his grandmother, with no books and no occupation but to fall in love. The object of his first passion was the daughter of the Commandant, who was a friend of his father. Like many of his later affairs, it never went beyond the imagination of this sentimental boy of fourteen. "I wrote her long letters which I never sent," he says in the *Cahier Rouge,* "and I left without ever having declared my passion, which survived my departure a good two months." The sentimental mood survived also, and his epistolary style no doubt gained in gallantry and elegance by those still-born letters, as the following to his mother's youngest sister, Mme. de Loys, will show:

"My dear Aunt Pauline,—I am so unfortunate as never to believe what flatters me, except on excellent proof, but Papa tells me you still remember me, and that you continue to love me. I have great confidence in him, but you will have to be his guarantee, and I shall not be convinced until you show me yourself and I read, written by your fair hand, 'My dear Benjamin, I love you still.' Papa told me that you are tall, of a good figure, amiable, beautiful. I have no doubt of it, and

> J'imagine de Flore la jeunesse,
> La taille et l'air de la nymphe des bois,
> Et de Vénus la grace enchanteresse
> Et de l'amour le séduisant minois,
> L'art d'arracher le doux chant des syrènes.[1]

That is a great deal too much. It would suffice for an aunt to be respectable, and if the portrait does not flatter, I shall have to love you as one loves a fair cousin. Would you like my portrait too? I am tall, thin, pale, my locks rival those of Apollo, as well as my verse. I am rebellious, petulant to the degree that my dear grandmother's head would not be safe. Nevertheless, I have a great desire to see her and to please her, so that I will reform. I shall not have the pleasure of embracing you before next year, for until then we must work at our education. Papa has made me give up drawing. I am sorry. I would like to have had the same accomplishment as you, my dear Aunt Pauline. I could

[1] I picture the youth of Flora,
With the shape and the air of a wood-nymph,
And the enchanting grace of Venus,
And the seductive features of love,
The art of stealing the syren's sweet song.

never have equalled you, but I would not have been annoyed by 1781
that. I know that

> Les muses, filles du ciel,
> Sont des sœurs sans jalousie ;
> Elles vivent d'ambroisie
> Et non d'absinthe et de fiel.[1]

If I am not your emulator, I may at least be your admirer. I am reasonably happy. I would lack nothing if only I had a playmate with whom to run and play, and a friend of my own age to whom I might speak of my joys and sorrows, but you know that perfect happiness is unknown. For man it is not created. I beg of you, my dear Aunt Pauline, answer me, I pray, and do not treat me as grandmama does ! " (1780 ?)

The months spent at Gertruidenberg were troubled by the coldness of the Générale, who believed that some one—Juste or Marianne—was trying to turn her grandson against her. A letter from Benjamin in the spring protests against such injustice, and declares that some one had poisoned her mind against him. Altogether he must have rejoiced when his father's *congé* allowed them to leave behind the dreary little Flemish town and the solitary meditations it had fostered, and to return to his relatives in Switzerland. Mr. May was dismissed, and he started in with the sixth tutor, M. Bridel, "learned but a pedant and very dear," who was as unsatisfactory as all the others, and was soon invited to follow them.

The infirmities of age were coming upon the Générale, and at her earnest desire there was a reunion of her children and grandchildren at Lausanne this winter. The dashing d'Hermenches, now a widower for a second time, was there ; Samuel's family came from Geneva, and Juste came through the snow-drifts with Benjamin. In honour of the gathering, d'Hermenches composed and read a long and rather dull poem. It contained the couplet :

> " Autour de moi je sens dormir à l'aise
> Ceux que j'aurais tant de plaisir à voir." [2]

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[1] The Muses, daughters of the sky,
Are sisters who know not jealousy,
They live on ambrosia
And not on absinthe and gall.

[2] " I feel about me, peacefully sleeping,
Those whom it would have been such joy to see."

1782 The chance was irresistible, and the disrespectful Benjamin, unabashed by his magnificent uncle, parodied it as follows :

> " Et par mes vers je fais dormir à l'aise
> Ceux que j'aurais," etc.[1]

Rosalie adds to her account of this reunion that the Margrave of Anspach was spending that winter in Lausanne, having just separated from his mistress, Mlle. Clairon, the actress, and " as he had to have some one to take her place it made a great commotion in Lausanne society." The Constants were in a position to meet him socially, and to entertain him, and the Margrave, who was a zealous promoter of the university founded by his family, probably then suggested to Juste that he send Benjamin to the University of Erlangen. The reign of tutors was now to end, and the boy was to be launched on a more self-reliant mode of life. We shall see to what extravagances he devoted this newly-acquired independence.

The University of Erlangen, to which Benjamin was now transplanted (February 6, 1782), was still very young, having been founded only forty years before by the Margrave Charles Frederic of Anspach-Bayreuth. The Margrave had married his cousin, Wilhelmina of Prussia, the favourite sister of Frederic the Great, and through her the lamp of culture, lighted at the court of Prussia, had been carried to the little principality of Anspach, whose court came to rank next to those of Rheinsberg and Sans Souci among the German states—a position which it held for thirty years. Following the example of Frederic, the petty German princes sought to imitate the court of Louis XIV, and aspired to be patrons of learning and art. As Germany had as yet no school of literature of her own, French culture was adopted with the French language at the German courts. Wilhelmina, like her brother, had picked up from the French refugees the rudiments of French taste which Frederic developed so zealously, and had profited also by a long friendship and correspondence with Voltaire, and she was accordingly pleased to encourage the advancement of learning at her husband's court.

In 1769, when the Bayreuth line became extinct through the death of Charles Frederic without male issue, Charles Alexander, the last male of the house of Anspach-Brandenburg, succeeded as Margrave of Bayreuth-Anspach. He was the Margrave whom

[1] " And by my verses, I put to sleep
Those whom," etc.

Benjamin knew. According to that delightful gossip, the Baroness 1782
d'Oberkirch, the new Margrave set all Europe talking of his follies and eccentricities, which knew no bounds. In appearance he was a " caricature of Cicero's bust ; retreating forehead, eyes high up in his head, nose like a trumpet, enormous turned-up chin, long ungainly neck." He had a gift for mimicry, to which all the peculiarities of his courtiers were sacrificed. But he was beloved by his people, in spite of his idiosyncrasies. He was greatly interested in the stage, which led to his intimacy with the famous actress, Mlle. Clairon, who had made her reputation in the tragedies of Voltaire. In 1773 she was installed at his court as friend, adviser, mistress—" Maman " was his pet name for her, for she was long past her first youth—and for seventeen years she ruled the Margrave, and his poor sick apathetic wife, his court, and his Ministers, to their eternal benefit, according to her own testimony.

The Margrave's two passions, next to Mlle. Clairon, were the University of Erlangen and travel. He united these two interests by losing no opportunity to advertise the University while he was on his journeys, and this may explain why Benjamin was sent there so soon after the Margrave's appearance in Lausanne. He was indefatigable in his endeavours to secure the most celebrated scholars in Europe as professors, and insisted on a university course of at least two years for all who wished to be represented in the governmental bodies of his kingdom.

There were between two hundred and fifty and three hundred students in the University when Benjamin matriculated. Among them were many foreigners, some of them from remote parts of Europe, who gave a cosmopolitan air to the University. And the professors were as cosmopolitan as the students. Although the town had only eight thousand inhabitants, it was very much alive, and in addition to progressive political views it boasted three newspapers. So Benjamin had come to an atmosphere entirely favourable to the development of his natural bent. The group of oblong, three-storey buildings that comprised the University, plain and severe in their architecture, stood on the corner of the Schloss-Platz, under the shadow of the Evangelical Church. The lecture halls and college chapel, as well as the library, were all in these buildings. Benjamin must have revelled in the fine collection of old books, the nucleus of which had come from the convent of Heilbronn, and which had been enriched by successive additions from the private libraries of the Margraves. The persevering M. Rudler has unearthed the programme of studies for the years

1782 when he was there, which included Aristotle, Euripides, Horace and Juvenal; logic, rhetoric, natural theology and moral theology; history, modern, civil and universal; German history, heraldry and diplomacy, and some metaphysics; but which of these subjects Benjamin pursued we do not know. He tells us himself that at first he studied with great diligence. Juste's efforts to give him a superior education had not been fruitless in so far as, in addition to the vast amount of classical learning he had stored up, the boy had also acquired the habits and tastes of a student and a thinker. He now had his first opportunity to break his solitude and to make friends with boys of his own age, but he seems not to have availed himself of it. He wrote to his Uncle Samuel a note introducing "some young friends" who were to spend a few days in Geneva; but the following letter to Wilhelm de Sévery (who had just won a proctorship at the Military Academy of Colmar) indicates that as yet the pleasures of congenial companionship were denied him:

"If I did not love you so much I would envy you, my dear cousin, but your success has only increased the affection I feel for you, and stimulated me to deserve yours. I am really afraid that in the midst of your studies and of the honours you have merited and won, in the midst of the applause of your masters and the congratulations, possibly a little forced, of your companions, you have forgotten a cousin who rejoices more than all the others at your brilliant success. I assure you, my dear cousin, that it gives me extreme pleasure and that if the slightest testimonial of your love should relieve me of the fear lest you have forgotten me, I should be still happier. Answer, I beg you, and tell me what you are doing, if among your companions you have a friend, if you intend to return to Switzerland, and when I may hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again.

"For my part, the list of my occupations is short. I work nearly eight hours a day, I ride every afternoon, I go every evening to pay my respects to the Margravine,[1] and sometimes I take a hand at cards and I have supper there. She is much more gracious to me than I deserve. She loads me with favours. She has promised that I shall go every evening to the Court—a distinction that she has granted to me only. She has obtained for me the position of gentleman-in-waiting to His Highness the Margrave; in short, I cannot express all my obligation to her. The only thing that remains to be desired here is a friend—and I find none, I think, of the sort I should like. You are too much my superior, my dear cousin, for me to dare to propose that you should fill the place, and I ought to consider myself sufficiently happy if you sometimes condescend to remember me.

[1] The Dowager Margravine of Anspach.

"Adieu, my dear cousin. Love me a little, answer my letter 1782
and sometimes think, I beg, of your cousin, who is your equal only
in his affection, BENJAMIN DE CONSTANT."

The extreme politeness of the French epistolary style must be taken into account, if we are tempted to suspect that the sprightly young university man might be making fun of his cousin's complacency over his little successes. Moreover, Benjamin rarely permitted his habitual irony to creep into his familiar correspondence. There, if nowhere else, he was able to drop the rôle of trifler and mocker that served to mask his natural timidity.

The Erlangen life had started off well. The widow of the last Margrave (Sophie Caroline of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel) received the young Swiss "with all the eagerness which princes who are bored show toward strangers who amuse them." . . . "As I said everything that popped into my head, and ridiculed everybody, and as I defended the most extravagant opinions very wittily, I was bound to be a very diverting person in a German court," he wrote in the *Cahier Rouge*. The old Dowager at first relished his wit immensely and forgave all his impertinences, which were no doubt insufferable. She appointed him to some office connected with her household, perhaps that of page, but his success made him venture too far, and that "viper's tongue" of his had a cruel sting. The limit of her indulgence was at last reached, and the spoiled plaything had an early experience of the instability of princes' favours. Possibly the Dowager was none too amiable herself. In 1788, when he was at the court of her brother, the Duke of Brunswick, and suspected her of spreading unfavourable reports about him to increase his unpopularity there, he wrote Mme. de Charrière: "She is a very meddlesome lady, known as such from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, and, so to speak, driven from here by her brother on account of her interferences." But the fault lay chiefly with Benjamin. He had celebrated his newly acquired independence by embracing all the opportunities for riotous living that Erlangen offered, and in addition to gambling excessively, he plunged into all sorts of extravagances, and accumulated many debts, which his father always paid without a word. No doubt his foolishness was known in the Margrave's circle. His crowning offence came when, desiring to add the glory of a mistress to his budding manly dignity, he perversely chose one whose family was in disgrace with the Dowager, and whose reputation was not of the fairest. "I never loved

1783 this girl," he says, " and she never accepted me—the only one she ever resisted—but the pleasure of hearing it said that I kept a mistress was my consolation." At the instigation of her family he carried to the drawing-room of his patroness all sorts of offensive jests learned from them. The Dowager reproved him for the company he kept and the rudeness of his manners, but then, as so often in his life, Benjamin seemed to be swept onward to his own undoing. " I have started in this way ; I must keep on "—how many times he said that, with a sort of vain obstinacy that took the place of firmness !

The affair ended in a dismissal from the Margrave's society. His father was notified of his evil course, and in the spring of 1783 Juste brought his scapegrace son back to Brussels. " Behold the Erlangen education finished already ! " the good cousins at Lausanne doubtless exclaimed at this fresh failure.

But Juste was undaunted. On July 8, Benjamin matriculated at Edinburgh, whither his father was attracted not only by the fame of the University, but by the fact that he had many old friends in that city. Perhaps it was through these friends that he found a home for his son with Dr. Andrew Duncan, who lectured in the University, and who had founded the first dispensary and the first insane hospital in Scotland. Dr. Duncan took a lively interest in the foreign students who came to Edinburgh, and received them as inmates of his own large family. The historian of the University mentions among the students thus received a " singular character from Switzerland, Baron Constant."

In 1783 Edinburgh University was at the height of its fame and influence both at home and abroad—an influence largely due to the great number of distinguished men on its faculty. It was but eight years since Hume had—in the flowery language of Mackintosh—" ceased to illumine our frozen sphere." Robertson the historian, who had been Principal for twenty years, had in that time improved and enlarged the University and added the so-called " New Buildings." Sir James Mackintosh, who was Benjamin's fellow-student and friend, enumerates in his Memoirs the " extraordinary " men, many of them forgotten by our generation, whose repute attracted students from distant lands. Among them were Dr. Black, " father of modern chemistry " ; John Home, " author of the best English tragedy since Otway " ; Henry Mackenzie, " author of the most exquisite pathetic fiction in our language " ; Adam Smith, " first economical philosopher and eloquent theoretical

moralist of modern times"; Dr. Cullen, "the most celebrated 1783
medical teacher and writer in Europe." Ferguson taught morals, and Robison mathematics; and above them all was the "elegant, amiable and accomplished" Dugald Stewart, the bright and particular star of eighteenth-century philosophy, "almost the only standing column of the Caledonian Muse," writes Mackintosh. Dugald Stewart encouraged taste for literature among the students, and many young men were attracted there by his fame. One of them has written: "His lectures were like the opening of heaven. For the first time I felt that I had a soul." In politics his influence was for Liberalism.

As most of the students were poor boys, who had made great sacrifices in order to come there, sometimes walking many miles daily to and from their homes in the surrounding country, or cooking their own meals and mending their own clothes in their miserable lodgings, the atmosphere of the University was favourable to serious effort and industry. "Work was the fashion there," wrote Benjamin. Everybody was eager for knowledge and for new ideas. There was very little organization or college spirit among the students. As there were no dormitories, they were scattered about through the Old Town in rooms or lodgings, while the professors lived in the Wynd; and as the classes were large, and the students quite young—rarely over fourteen, when they entered—and the tutorial system was not used, there was slight opportunity for personal contact between the students and the faculty. The centres of social intercourse therefore were the various debating clubs, literary and philosophical, in which the limited memberships fostered sociability.

To at least one of these, the Speculative Society—Benjamin belonged. This club, which still flourishes, included among its members the most distinguished young men of Scotland and many of the foreign students. The meetings were on Tuesday evenings and each member in turn was expected to present and defend a question, literary or scientific, all the Club taking part in the discussion which followed and voting on the question at the end. Benjamin was an active member from the first, rarely absent from a meeting, and debating with great ardour and ease; and the Speculative Society, no doubt, helped to form his opinions as well as to develop his facility in debate. His name appears on the records of the Society as having spoken in the discussions on the following significant questions: "Was the execution of Charles I. justifiable?" (Benjamin in the affirmative); "Should the defence

1783 of a free state be by militia or by standing army?"; "Were the Crusades an advantage to Europe?"; "Is duelling justifiable?"; "Should women have a higher education?" (Benjamin in the affirmative, but the vote was negative); "Are Deputies bound to obey rulers or electors?" The subjects presented by Benjamin himself show the early trend of his interest: "Is it necessary to grant universal suffrage?"; "The influence of Pagan myths on customs and character"; "Does national character depend more on physical or on natural causes?"

It would be interesting to know precisely the impression this volatile, picturesque youth made upon his Scotch fellow-students. In 1815 Mme. de Staël wrote to Benjamin from England that she was meeting frequently in society his old college friend, Sir James Mackintosh, who told her that in Edinburgh he was considered the most extraordinary being in the world. "Indeed, I think you are, in every sense," she added. Mackintosh alludes to him in his Memoirs, in connection with the Speculative Society, where they became acquainted, as "Baron Constant de Rebecque, a Swiss of singular manners and powerful talents." The two men show some traits in common, particularly in the way their lives developed. We might almost think we were reading of Benjamin, when MacCosh writes of Mackintosh, after describing how he passed from medicine to the law and thence into Parliament: "Notwithstanding his great intellectual powers, he never fulfilled the expectations of his friends, owing to a lack of concentration and firmness; but he obtained great eminence as a talker in the best social circles of London."

They met in after years in Paris, when Mackintosh was a distinguished judge in Bombay, and Benjamin was making himself conspicuous in political circles, but there was no renewal of the old ties. Yet it was in Edinburgh that Benjamin first realized the joys of congenial companionship, and the friends he made there were long cherished by him. In 1788 he wrote Mme. de Charrière from Brunswick, when he was settling his possessions in his lodgings, that he kept the letters from his Scotch friends in a certain drawer of his bureau. It was not until the painful events of those years in Brunswick had blotted out many precious associations of his youth that he allowed them to drop out of his life. He never forgot his love for John Wilde, who, after attaining to a professorship in the University (where he had Walter Scott as a pupil) and writing a successful book, lost his mind and died in sad obscurity. In the *Cahier Rouge* he is described as a man possessed of "an absolute

power over his friends, of immense knowledge, indefatigable ardour, studious, brilliant in conversation, and of excellent character." Of these friends we shall hear more, during the adventures of his runaway trip to England. He was undoubtedly a conspicuous as well as popular character in the University, and his memory was alive there twenty years afterwards, when Mackintosh told Mme. de Staël that he still had friends there who " retained a high opinion of him." 1783

We do not know what direction his studies took, except that he was registered for Alexander Fraser's courses in history and with Andrew Dalzel in Greek. Dalzel was very popular, according to Cockburn, attracting the students by the warmth and sincerity of his enthusiasm and stimulating their ambition and their taste for literature by " charming pictures of virtue and poetry." Fraser, on the other hand, was cold, impersonal and elegant, but lacking in originality or spirit. If we can judge by the kind of work Benjamin mapped out for himself on leaving, the inspiration he got from Edinburgh was mainly in the direction of ancient history. The year after he left he was already at work upon his *History of Polytheism,* which was to occupy him all his life, in the form it finally assumed, and several other works, mentioned in his letters as begun or contemplated in the next few years, relate to classical antiquities. His first printed essay was an anonymous translation of part of Gillies' *History of Greece,* that portion which dealt with the customs of the Greeks in the Heroic Age and with the traces of Egyptian influence on their civilization. The conservative political and religious ideas of Gillies were far removed from those of Benjamin as we know him, and moreover another translation of the History had appeared before his was ready, but he said in his preface that he put out his rendering as an experiment, and that if the results were successful, he would proceed to the translation of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Although the specimen he offered justified his continuance, and the ease and mobility of his style, in addition to his remarkable instinct for languages, fitted him for a successful translator, his " little Greeks," as he called the essay, when in 1787 he concluded to " send them out in the world to *shift for themselves,*" had only a limited circulation, apparently confined to his immediate circle of friends. His projected translation of Gibbon was also forestalled, and by two collaborators, of whom one was no less person than Louis XVI. Thus ended his ambitions for that kind of work.

1790 "I think I will give myself to botany or some science dealing with facts. Morals and politics are too vague, and man too dull and inconsistent [he wrote Mme. de Charrière]; at the very moment of forming this resolution I am about to produce a political work, which ought to be finished in one month, to get money. I have taken it into my head that with the assistance of my wits I might be able to pay my debts, and I have made an agreement with a bookseller in Brabant. He will give me fifty *louis* for it. I would as readily do that as nothing. The book will be bad, but it will sell on account of its title. The bookseller will lose on it; the public does not matter." (September 17, 1790.)

But three months later his "Brabançons have gone up in smoke like their originals, and the fifty *louis* with them"; and a long period of literary inactivity succeeded. The treatise on Brabant had been merely a pot-boiler, and he undoubtedly owed to his friend Mme. de Charrière any passing interest the subject may have held for him. Antiquities and philosophy were more to his taste at that period than modern political themes, and the trend of his University training had been toward abstract metaphysical speculations that bore very little relation to the practical problems of life. On the other hand, there had been little cultivation of the artistic and imaginative side of his nature. He never learned to enjoy poetry, and his æsthetic appreciations were singularly undeveloped, even for his time. The one great artistic production of his mature years, his novel *Adolphe*, was accidental, isolated, and being in truth purely autobiographical, cannot be called an imaginative composition; moreover, it is wholly devoid of poetic value except such as springs from the sincerity of its emotion. The literary style in which he came to excel was not one that is evolved in solitude or in communion with nature, but in the political arena and from contact with men and affairs—a nervous, keen, concise style, distinctly personal, which makes him fascinating reading even to-day, no matter how dry or antiquated his theme. But he cannot be said to owe it to his academic training or to any interests there awakened. With his philosophical studies it was different, and in the atmosphere of Suard's salon in Paris he was soon to find a favourable environment for the sprouting of the ideas he brought with him from Edinburgh.

At first the studious, earnest spirit of the University had inspired him to be industrious. For the first time he felt a genuine love of study. "It is hard to conceive," says Mackintosh, "a University where work was more general, where reading was more

fashionable, and ignorance more disreputable. All minds were in a 1785
state of ferment." Gradually, however, the zeal for work yielded to the craving for the companionship and excitement that his isolated childhood had never tasted. The absence of any sort of restraint or discipline in the University combined, with the curiosity and eagerness for experience that his active mind engendered, for his undoing; and his nobler interests were sacrificed to the satisfaction of these unprofitable impulses. His latent passion for gambling revived and was incontinently indulged. As usual, it was an unscrupulous master who assisted him on the way to destruction, for his music-teacher's brother kept a faro bank. He is also known to have participated in those "Bacchanalian Orgies" mentioned by Mackintosh as led by Dr. Brown, the famous choirmaster, who revolutionized the mediæval standards of the University, and who had a great vogue with a certain set of students. The fruit of all these excesses was that curious cynicism epitomized in his favourite phrase, *Je me tue, donc je m'amuse!* He tells us that he stayed in Edinburgh as long as his father intended he should, but there were rumours of debts, and indications in the records of the Speculative Society that some misdemeanours had hastened his departure. In March 1785 we find him in Paris, after a three weeks' sojourn in London, with the good impression of his early months at Edinburgh destroyed and the taste of ashes in his mouth; only seventeen and already embarked upon that way of life he has characterized in the *Journal* as *très-agitée, je dirai misérable.* The climax of these excesses in Paris barely escaped ruining him.

Juste aimed at giving his son a thoroughly cosmopolitan education, and he sought for him in Paris a *milieu* that would best perpetuate the traditions of his British training. How he knew Suard—whether through the Neckers, whom he had met in Switzerland or by introduction from some of Suard's Edinburgh friends—is not clear, but before Benjamin left Scotland, Juste had arranged for him to reside under the roof of that distinguished journalist and *littérateur.* But once again his well-laid plans miscarried. The apartment at Suard's was not ready for the young man upon his premature arrival, and his introduction to the pleasures of life in the great metropolis was received in a *hôtel garni,* where he was temporarily accommodated until Suard could take him. The person who put the finishing touches on the dissolute career already so far advanced was a rich and libertine young Englishman who lived at his *hôtel,* and who obligingly led him down the

1785 primrose path of women and gambling, and landed him at the bottom in an entanglement of debts and debauchery. The removal to Suard's house in the rue Louis le Grand after a month of this dissipation, failed to rescue him, for Juste's eternal ill-luck in tutors still pursued him, and a licentious adventurer who passed himself off as a Protestant persecuted for his faith, added whatever was lacking to the corrupt education of his pupil. But here, as in many a later crisis, Benjamin's brains came to the rescue of his morals, or, as M. Rudler has expressed it, he would not endure from his tutor's platitudes what he perhaps would have tolerated in his immoralities. He wearied of his stupidity, quarrelled with him, and in retaliation was betrayed to his father, in all his foolish corruption, by a letter from the resentful tutor. In consequence, his Paris residence had an abrupt termination, and Juste transplanted him to the equally dangerous surroundings of Brussels, where at least he would receive occasional parental supervision. All these details are related in the *Cahier Rouge*,[1] in a bitter, ironical tone, and with a relegation of all responsibility for his own follies to the unwisdom and short-sightedness of his father. But Juste is entitled to some sympathy and indulgence. The problem of dealing with this sensitive, egotistic and extraordinarily alert young mind was one which many a wiser man would shrink from tackling single-handed. Juste had no assistance from maternal intuitions and sympathies, and was forced by circumstances to long and estranging separations from his son.

Benjamin passed the autumn at Brussels, loafing and making love, with occasional fits of working on the *History of Polytheism*. In the Genevese circles which he frequented he met a Mme. Johannot, an attractive woman of between twenty-five and thirty, who inspired a lasting gratitude in the diffident youth by her unsolicited avowal of affection for him.

"She has taken a place in my memory quite different from any of the women I have met. My affair with her was very short and rather slight, but she never forced me to buy the sweet sensation she gave me by any mixture of agitation or difficulty, and at forty I am still grateful to her for the happiness I owed her at eighteen."

Notwithstanding her graciousness, Mme. Johannot had a very sad ending. Several years after Benjamin knew her she poisoned

[1] It must not be forgotten that this is Literature, quite as much as Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, or Rousseau's *Confessions*, to which it bears a sort of resemblance, and that the accuracy of facts must not be too much insisted upon.

herself in despair over her husband's infidelities. Strangely enough 1786
the tragedy occurred only a few doors from where her former young admirer was living and in complete ignorance of her proximity, for the sweetness of his intercourse with this facile lady had been ruthlessly interrupted by Juste, who carried him off to Switzerland.

A winter in the storm-bound solitude of Le Désert was a dreary contrast to the life that he had been leading, and afforded him some opportunity for reflection upon the follies which were now bringing him the inevitable penalties of wrecked health. For his misery and loneliness he had no more exciting antidote than the society of his cousin Rosalie, whom he begged to come over to play duets and beat him at chess.

" Think of us buried at Le Désert, unable to get out, on account of the snow, the cold and the rain ; and of me in particular, who have neither digestion nor lungs nor eyes, and whom you promised to help to forget my sorrows. Think how cruel it is to deprive an unfortunate creature of his last consolation, and how, obliged to renounce all the vanities of the world, I have nothing but your friendship for comfort. . . . Adieu, my dear cousin—if you happen to find a stomach, eyes and lung, send them to me, but I shall have to have them quickly, or I shall be in danger of having no further need of them." (March 19, 1786.)

After an absence of four years, Benjamin now had an opportunity to renew the intimacy with his relatives in Switzerland. But the impression was not favourable on either side. There are hints in his letters to his uncle of little jealousies, misunderstandings and criticisms, which annoyed the young man immeasurably, filled as he was at this time with an exalted sense of his own superiority to his quiet, sedate cousins. A letter from Mme. de Sévery, which seems to relate to this winter in Lausanne, shows how the family looked upon the grand airs of this young collegian, fresh from foreign and, in his opinion, more advanced civilizations.

" M. de Sévery was at Bellevue [the residence of the painter Huber] yesterday, where he met Benjamin, who was haranguing the company with a vanity, a conceit, a presumption quite unbounded—interrupting everybody, attacking the magistracy of Lausanne, criticizing and offering plans of government. In short, he is just like his father, with this difference, that he is not so polished and infinitely less agreeable. He charmed the Hubers from the start because they were taken in by him."

1786 While forced to admit the amazing intelligence of her nephew, which had captivated the strangers, Mme. de Sévery here, as everywhere else when Benjamin was concerned, reveals such jealousy and dislike of him, as well as of his father, that she is never able to appreciate or comprehend his strange and fascinating personality. Politically, too, they were at variance; "from two impertinent young scoundrels," her husband wrote on a scrap of paper which he pinned fast to two letters, one of which was from Benjamin, expounding his political heresies. To this erratic and wilful youth, so recently and thoroughly initiated into *le monde où l'on s'amuse*, the provincial decorum of Lausanne standards acted as a stimulus to further extravagances of manners and speech. It may be that his fondness for some of these relatives whose range of interests and ideas was very limited, at least from his standpoint, was never anything more than a dutiful assumption (always excepting Rosalie and Mme. de Nassau), and Samuel's doubts of his affectionate protestations were perhaps justified, although to have made them the theme of an argumentative correspondence with him, as his uncle did, was scarcely a tactful procedure.

One of the grievances aired in this correspondence with Samuel, was Benjamin's repeatedly broken promises to visit his Geneva cousins. This neglect was due to a superior attraction offered by Lausanne, which was fast obliterating from his heart the image of the kind and gracious Mme. Johannot. Mrs. Trevor, the successor of his Brussels flame, was the wife of the English ambassador to Turin. To escape from the ennui of a union that had not proved felicitous, she had come to Lausanne where she formed one of the foreign colony who even then made themselves at home in that hospitable town. "By the bye," wrote Gibbon to a friend in England that very summer when Benjamin was sighing at her feet, "Mrs. Trevor is here now, without her husband, and I am going to see her, about a mile out of the town. She is esteemed elegant and amiable." "Full of grace, of quiet bearing and self-confidence of deportment," is the testimony of a traveller who had seen her at Turin. When Benjamin knew her in the summer of 1786, she was about Mme. Johannot's age, an age especially attractive to timid, self-conscious young men such as he was, at least where women were concerned. Older women always put him at his ease, charmed him by their experience and flattered him by their appreciation and interest.

Mrs. Trevor's villa was a favourite resort of the dissipated young Englishmen who were idling about Lausanne. She was

reputed to be a coquette and, in addition to her personal attractions, 1786
the gambling which she permitted drew a lively company to her house, the "most brilliant and gayest of any in Lausanne," Benjamin says. She *had been* very beautiful, he adds, and still had a "charming expression and fine teeth and a delightful smile"; and he promptly fell in love with her. Following his characteristic mode of wooing, he declared his passion in an eloquent letter. The coquette offered him the "tenderest friendship" but no further hopes, and he deemed it befitting this response to exhibit the most violent despair, "and behold me rolling on the ground, beating my head against the wall at this terrible word 'friendship'!" In the cynicism of his middle age he could smile at the probable ennui the lady suffered from a "lover who argued over a synonym." "I did not then know that I should take rather than beg." This farcical love affair—for it is thus that he represents it in the *Cahier Rouge*—was interrupted by Juste, who had made up his mind to try the Paris experiment again. A "chaste kiss on lips ever so little faded," and he was spirited away to Paris, in a state of "inexpressible grief."

Charles de Constant, who accompanied his uncle and cousin on this journey, charged with a business mission to Paris on behalf of some Geneva people, relates in his journal that so excessive was Benjamin's despair at leaving Mrs. Trevor that at one time it seemed as if they might be obliged to turn back. But his passion was as brief as it was violent. Although he kept up a correspondence with her for some time, he convalesced so rapidly that by February, Charles wrote Rosalie, he was already able to jest about his obsession, and when he met her again, three months after the parting, it was without the least emotion. We hear of Mrs. Trevor several times after this; at a fête in Turin where she was honoured by the attentions of the Duke of Savoy, and in London where Charles's wife saw her; but her end was as tragic as that of Mme. Johannot. After being guilty of many audacious and foolish excesses, she finally became insane, and the mockery with which Benjamin has narrated his passion for her is redeemed by the pity with which he refers to her end. Notwithstanding the erotic absurdities of his love affairs (and it must be remembered that this was the sentimentalism of the novels upon which Benjamin and his generation had been nourished) and in spite of the swiftness with which the infatuation vanishes, he clings to the ghosts of these dead passions with remarkable tenacity. He loves to dwell on the memory of his emotions long after he has ceased to feel them.

1786 Twenty years after the occurrences just related, he is writing to Mme. de Nassau:

"The past is really the only thing that touches my heart and it interests and moves me solely by its quality of being past. I re-read the letters of people I loved twenty years ago, and who for the most part are no longer living. I live over my hopes, my sense of power—all that warmed my life, and it is only there that I can still derive some sparks of heat. What I loved two years ago *is* less precious than what I loved ten years ago, and what I love now and recently lacks the support of Memory. I can say this to you—you whom I have loved all my life. I believe that if I should again meet Mrs. Trevor, I would again fall in love with her, considering her date!" (April 24, 1808.)

If the recital of the extravagances of Benjamin's youth has not been edifying reading, it may at least be said that they were largely the result of misdirected energy, rather than of naturally depraved or dissolute tendencies. Deprived of a healthy outlet for his overwrought imagination, and handicapped by vanity and shyness, he was at the same time consumed by an intense craving for affection. "The greatest cause of the restlessness of my life has been the need of loving," he writes in the *Journal Intime*; meaning, not the lack of a worthy object, as was the case with Shelley, but the desire and, at the same time, the inability, to love. All this, the psychologist would say, is symptomatic of an enlarged *ego*, saved from assuming a maniac form by his equally exceptional intellectual enthusiasms. In the case of his intimacies with Mme. de Charrière and with Mme. de Staël, a devotion born of intellectual and temperamental correspondence succeeds to the artificial fire of passion kindled by his own inflammable imagination. But it is always a matter of the imagination, or else of the intellect, rather than of the heart or the senses, and nothing but intellectual sympathy will give it stability. Without this bond, it is quickly dispelled, as his overstimulated nervous system becomes exhausted and his sensibilities, fed on excitement and change, are burnt out.

The journey that thus tore Benjamin and Mrs. Trevor asunder, and ended in his reinstatement under the roof of Suard, is described in the letters which Charles de Constant wrote to his sisters. The party of three left Lausanne on the 16th of November with their own coach and horses. The trip occupied more than ten days, for they were disabled in the snowdrifts and obliged to beg shelter at a monastery. Charles, who privately thought travelling by post would have been cheaper as well as more expeditious, was sent forward to the monastery with Benjamin. Charles acted as

spokesman, "for Benjamin, although he is clever enough when he 1786
wants to be, when he does not choose to be, says not a word." It could not have been a cheerful journey, for in addition to the bad weather and delays, and Benjamin's dismal state of mind over his recent parting, Juste was in a disagreeable mood, contradicted everybody, and directed the arrows of his sarcasm upon his unhappy son, who, in return, had "ever a tear in his eye and an epigram on his lips" in response.

Arrived in Paris, they sought the *Hôtel des Etats Unis*, where Juste insisted that Charles should remain with them, and where they were, in Charles's opinion, very badly and expensively lodged, in a "miserable little *entresol* at four and a half *louis* a day," with a valet in common, who was "of no great use." Benjamin seems to have moved to Suard's very soon. Charles relates scornfully how particular his uncle was that Benjamin should now be known as *M. le Baron de Constant* [1] (a title apparently neglected at home), "with a ceremoniousness which exalts the young gentleman to the skies, and will be responsible more than anything for the foolish things he will do." Juste was ambitious to get him into society, he adds, especially that of men of letters, but Charles was sceptical of his cousin's capacity for a literary profession. "I am willing to wager that he will never be famous," he writes.

The recent settlement of Vergenne's negotiations between France and England had resulted in a financial boom which led to a mania for speculation in French securities, and proved disastrous in many cases. It was this speculation which had brought Charles to Paris on behalf of his father and some of their acquaintances. Strangers found themselves much courted there both in financial and in social circles, and Charles's letters are full of accounts of functions at the houses of the rich Genevese, the Rilliets, the Mallets, the de Lesserts and the Neckers, where he met some of the celebrities of the court and the city. This was the winter of the Assembly of Notables, and of Necker's downfall, and every one was deeply interested in political questions. The Paris of that day was very English in its social life, its amusements, its fashions of dress. Crowds went to Astley's, the famous English horse-trainer, and in February of this year Mme. d'Oberkirch

[1] During his efforts to establish his French citizenship after the Revolution, Benjamin "unbaroned" himself, as he said, although later his wife's German relatives resurrected the title. His father never omitted the "de," and Benjamin himself revived it after the first Restoration and during the Cent Jours.

1786 notes afternoon tea as a fashion just brought over. The relics of the old society complained bitterly of the Anglomania that had seized the new generation. Moreover, the Golden Age of the salon was passing away, the age when "no one ventured an opinion until he had visited the salons of Mlle. de Lespinasse or of Mme. Geoffrin, and learned what d'Alembert or Marmontel thought." Literature was giving place to politics as the theme of social interest, and young aspirants for celebrity no longer were dependent on certain distinguished drawing-rooms to give them a start on their career. A new arena was opening to them and a more independent one. If, as we are told, the intellectual calibre of this new society was to be gauged by the "triumph of tea over coffee as the fashionable stimulant," the altered tone of social intercourse is evident in the extravagance of entertainment, the elaborate dinners, the increase of gambling in private houses as well as in cafés and clubs. Mme. d'Oberkirch, whom we have already quoted more than once, introduces us to the drawing-rooms where Benjamin under the wing of Mme. Suard is sure to have appeared, and to the celebrities whom he must inevitably have met—such as Mme. de Genlis, "with her eternal harp which she dragged about with her everywhere," and Mme. Helvetius with her twenty Angora cats; to the ascensions of the aeronauts, and the séances of the Mesmerists, and the Lycée in the Place de Musée, which were the three fads of the day.

The Lycée was a sort of University Extension for select circles, and was open to women as well as men. Distinguished scholars in all branches of learning, and especially in the philosophy taught by Montesquieu and his followers, popularized their subjects for the benefit of the lay mind. There Garat lectured on history, La Harpe on literature, Condorcet and Delacroix on mathematics. It opened in 1786 with seven hundred subscribers, and all of Suard's set were enrolled either as lecturers or as hearers. Indeed, M. Rudler calls his salon a "sort of ante-chamber to the Lycée." Benjamin and his father were regular attendants at these lectures, which occupied most of their mornings, after which came visits to their male acquaintances, followed by dinner and a promenade, in which Charles joined them—in the Palais Royal, perhaps, or at Bagatelle, the enchanting park of the Duc d'Artois. Their evenings were passed in the salons of the ladies, or at the theatre,[1]

[1] "The theatres were then what they never were before and will never be again. Molé, Fleury, d'Agincourt, la Contat, la Durienne, made you forget that you were only looking at acting." (Journal of Charles, Geneva Archives.)

and in fine weather, Charles observes, they were able to walk to 1786
their destination, which saved them the cost of a carriage. From Charles's journal we can trace Benjamin's social activities during that winter, but Charles frequented the society of the rich Genevese more than his more fastidious cousin. This may explain why Benjamin failed to meet Mme. de Staël at this time. Charles was her guest at the Swedish Embassy in December, but was bored and ill at ease among the crowd of guests. They took very little notice of an obscure young Swiss whose only title to attention was having made two journeys to China. He seems not to have been impressed by the brilliancy of the conversation, which was all about theatres and court-gossip; "You could not get into it at all," he says, "if you did not know all the actors by name, and the names of all the literary men and celebrities, and what they had done during the week." He was at the Embassy again in January, and wrote quite disrespectfully of the lady who was to play so large a rôle in Benjamin's life, as a "*parvenue*," whose "pedantic and haughty tone" he disliked. Benjamin's acquaintance with the celebrated daughter of Necker was (perhaps providentially) deferred till the time when his own development as well as the course of public events should bring about the psychological moment for their meeting. But he was at home in many other equally celebrated drawing-rooms, for besides Mme. Suard's Mondays and Fridays, there were Thursdays at Mme. Piscatory's where Marmontel was the lion, and Wednesdays at Mme. Saurin's whose house was frequented by the same people as Suard's. And Charles wrote of his dining at Mme. de Pailly's and meeting Mirabeau there.

Of Mme. Saurin, Benjamin has preserved an amusing story. She had been handsome once, he says, but at sixty-five she was the only one who remembered it. He ridiculed her as he did every one he met, and he had nicknamed her "Schwabaham" after a character in Crébillon. Nevertheless, he confided in her more than in any one he knew at that time in Paris, and she in return was very cordial to him. Having fallen again into the gambling habit, he needed money and he determined to ask her for it. As usual his timidity took refuge in a letter which he followed up by a visit to learn the results. But the ancient beauty had failed to receive the letter, and mistook his ambiguous and hesitating explanations for a declaration of love. She exhibited great emotion, at which, when he comprehended the cause, Benjamin took alarm. When, at last, he succeeded in making her under-

1786 stand that it was not her heart but her money of which he stood in need, she rose without a word and counted out the money which he had asked for. "We were so embarrassed that the whole thing was transacted in perfect silence; I did not even open my mouth to thank her." Mme. Saurin was a good-natured woman and bore him no grudge for this awkward scene. In 1792, when he was at the court of Brunswick, she wrote to his friend Mme. de Charrière:

"For a long time you have said nothing about M. de Constant. Did he come to Verdun with the King of Prussia? That is not a nice way to come to France. . . . I am always interested in him, however singular and erratic he may be. His fine qualities and his mentality are unforgettable."

Whether he ever repaid the money we do not know, but he at least was gracious enough to send his regards to her, through Mme. de Charrière, and added:

"I am perhaps still just as much of an ass [as then], but at least I no longer take pride in my nights of dissipation, my gambling, my ruinous life, and in my physical sufferings by day brought on by the excesses of the night. If only chance would bring us once more together at the Hôtel de Chine,[1] we could stand a little boring from *Schwabaham*, who is at heart a good woman; and from Mme. Suard, who is more absurd and not so good. What is the fiery Comméras about? There is a Sainte-Croix at Liége; could it be the Sainte-Croix of the *déjeuners*, and of the Bal de Conjura-a-ation, and of Mme. de Pourrat, the delight of everybody?" (April 28, 1788.)

This letter introduces the names of several people of whom more is to be told. When or where Benjamin met Mme. de Charrière, who was in Paris this winter with her husband, we do not know. It might have been at Mme. Saurin's or at Necker's or at Suard's. All the clue we have is a letter from Charles to his sisters on March 6th, in which he says jubilantly, "I have made the acquaintance of Mme. de Charrière de Zuilen." Her connection with Benjamin must have a chapter to itself; Mme. de Pourrat and her friend Sainte-Croix were concerned in the crowning folly of his Paris residence—"the masterpiece of his adolescence," M. Rudler calls it—in which he made his exit from a stage on which he had not on the whole won either distinction nor anything else worth preserving, save one intimate friend. Before considering this final

[1] No. 5, rue Thérèse, where Mme. de Charrière lived when Benjamin knew her in Paris.

extravaganza of his youth, the part of Suard and of his wife's 1787
salon in the development of Benjamin's intellectual life must not be overlooked in the recital of his "*opéra-bouffe performances*" in Paris in the twentieth year of his age.

Son of the secretary of the University at Besançon, Suard had first appeared in Paris literary circles as the protégé of Buffon and of Mme. Geoffrin. His enthusiasm for foreign literature, especially English, brought him into prominence as a translator and publisher, and he collaborated with his friend, the Abbé Arnaud, in the publication of the *Journal Étranger* and the *Gazette Littéraire*. He owned a large library of English books, which, however, he had been obliged to sell before Benjamin knew him. He reckoned among his friends Sterne, Garrick and Hume (a life of whom he had published) and Robertson, who was teaching in Edinburgh when Benjamin was there and whose history of Charles V. Suard translated. His zeal in bringing the English writers to the acquaintance of the French was rewarded by election to the Academy in 1772, but the election was annulled by the Duc de Richelieu on account of his reputed collaboration in the *Encyclopédie*. Two years later he was re-elected and was made Dramatic Censor and perpetual secretary. After the disgrace of his patron, the Duc de Choiseul, Suard lost his position on the *Gazette de France*, and this, in addition to his failing health, brought him into financial straits which obliged him to accept aid from his friend Necker. As his house in the rue Louis le Grand was larger than he needed, he was glad to eke out his modest income by renting two bachelor suites, in one of which his friend, the Abbé Arnaud, lived. It may have been the other of these suites that Benjamin occupied, or he may have been an actual inmate of the family. Shortly after Benjamin came to them Suard's financial embarrassment was relieved by his engagement on the *Journal de Paris*, but he continued to live simply and economically. After the Revolution he became the director of the *Publiciste*, the political opponent of the *Journal des Débats*, and was assisted by Barante, Guizot and by the lively Mlle. de Meulan whom Guizot married.

Garat, in his Memoir of Suard, says he was "the portrait of a gentleman, with his tall slight figure always clad in the latest fashion." Although he survives to-day merely as a name, he was the friend of nearly all the great philosophers of his time, and his salon was the rendezvous of the foreigners who visited Paris. He had received his education in the most famous salons of the eighteenth century, and it was his dream to reproduce in his own home the atmosphere of

1787 those brilliant but simple gatherings, already a thing of the past, where freedom of thought and speech were combined with elegance of taste. Although a thoughtful serious man and very cautious in expressing any extreme or radical opinions, he was open to new ideas and welcomed to his salon all the apostles of the intellectual fads of the generation to which he belonged—Garat, La Harpe, Condorcet, Fourcroy, Abbé Morellet, d'Alembert. Thus Benjamin had an opportunity to sample all the heresies of the eighteenth century—atheism, anglomania, the sentimentalism of Rousseau, the radical materialism of Helvetius, of Condorcet, Marmontel, d'Holbach and Lacretelle—which found in his mind favourable soil for germination. In this brilliant company he was, according to Charles, " perfectly received," and his intelligence and ready wit made him exceedingly popular. The women adored him, and the men forgave his impertinences on account of his youth. His vanity fed upon the applause that his sallies won for him, and he found it an easy matter to turn their speech and manners into ridicule. " I paraphrased their civilities and they took it for incivility," he says.

The drawing-rooms he frequented were not all as innocuous as those of Suard and Mme. Saurin. Among the people whom he had met at Mrs. Trevor's was an old French woman, Mme. de Bourbonne, whose house in Paris was a favourite resort of gamblers, and Benjamin's weakness for play led him there with the rest. " She was a furious gambler," he says, " but otherwise a good woman and an eccentric one. She gambled in her carriage, in her bed, in her bath, morning, noon and night, always and everywhere that it was possible." She had a " quinze " every day, and he was sure to be there, and invariably lost, and begged or borrowed when his money was gone. He also gambled at the house of the Comtesse de Linières, who had a scandalous reputation. His father at length decided that nothing short of matrimony would check his excesses and pay his debts. Already the old ladies in his social world had been busy picking out wives for him, as old ladies love to do for their protégés. Mlle. de Piscatory was Mme. Suard's candidate, but Juste preferred Mlle. Pourrat, an attractive young woman of sixteen, whose charms were reinforced by an income of 90,000 *livres*. So he presented an ultimatum to his son with an authority which was convincing : either he must quit Paris and join his father at Bois-le-Duc, or he must win the lady. Benjamin showed himself entirely ready to carry out his father's wishes in regard to Mlle. Pourrat, and dutifully wrote to her mother, requesting

the hand of Mlle. Jenny. The refusal, with the information that 1787
her daughter was already affianced, did not appear to him to be insurmountable. His romantic imagination exploited the situation, and a certain obstinacy, born of opposition and strengthened by the fear of banishment to the wilds of Bois-le-Duc, drove him to an act of madness. He pursued his wooing undeterred, and by the bizarre methods peculiar to him. While in the presence of Mlle. Jenny, he preserved the most demure and indifferent manner, but immediately he was out of the house he addressed long letters to her, burning with passion, full of protestations against the sin of her wedding against the dictates of her heart (which he assumed to be wholly in his favour) and proposing to abduct her in order to rescue her from such a horrible fate. The dénouement came when Mme. de Pourrat related to her friend M. de Sainte-Croix in the presence of her daughter's temperamental young suitor, the whole story of his absurdities, of which she had been cognizant all the time. Mortified and half-crazed besides from the emotional state into which he had worked himself, Benjamin went into a violent attack of hysteria, and, taking from his pocket a little vial of opium (given him by Mme. de Charrière, who used it for her " vapours " and prescribed it for his " *maladie* ") he began to drink it—" not *too* rapidly " ; whereat M. de Sainte-Croix put the climax on this crude melodrama by rushing upon him with such violence as to cause him to spill half the dose. His tantrum quieted by this mishap, Benjamin sat down and meekly swallowed the antidote that his excited companions administered—" not that I was frightened," he says, " but because I was tired of the struggle. I was quite indifferent as to the result." As a further antidote, Mme. Pourrat proposed that they all go off to the theatre to see Beaumarchais' *Tarare*, taking with them the young lady for whose sake this scene had been enacted. " This was not the only time in my life," Benjamin adds, " that after a glorious deed I suddenly got bored by the solemnity its continuance demanded, and that from sheer weariness I have undone my work."

He recovered from his unhappy passion with his customary celerity, but the coming day of reckoning with his father was not so easily dismissed. Then it was that he had a vision of England, the land of culture—and of freedom, which was more to the point ! All the philosophical and political ideas he had been imbibing at Suard's, and in his long conversations with Mme. de Charrière, were fermenting in his brain, and he was seized by the idea of freeing himself from the irksome conventionalities of his life, of

1787 escaping from the net in which he was entangled. But it was characteristic of Benjamin that he drifted, rather than decided, and that the intervention of the little gods, in the absence of his own resolution, secured the execution of his plans. "Usually what has aided me most in making decisions which were absurd, but which seemed at least to imply a great decision of character, has been precisely the absence of that decision, and the feeling that I have always had that what I was doing was nothing short of irrevocable," he has said. In short, he let events lead him, and believed he was led by Fate.

In this particular case, Fate took the form of a cabriolet. For it so happened that he had sold the coach that had brought him and his father to Paris, in order to meet some of his debts, and the cabriolet in which he was compelled to set out with the friend to whom Juste had entrusted the responsibility of bringing the prodigal to Bois-le-Duc, proved close quarters for two. "We were frightfully crowded. I was in the back, and M. Bénay, who was very fat, was seated on a little chair between my legs, shaking and tipping with every jolt. Very soon he began to complain, and I went him one better on all his complaints." The result was that the occupant of the little chair found it impossible to continue the journey under such circumstances, and decided to return to Paris for a more commodious conveyance. Thus Benjamin gained a day of grace; the use he made of it will be narrated in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

AN EXCURSION INTO VAGABONDIA

(1787)

THE following letter [1] from Benjamin to Mme. de Charrière, 1787 dated from Dover, 26th June 1787, will explain why M. Bénay was obliged to continue his journey to Holland alone :

" There is in the world, unsuspected by the world, a German author who observes with much wisdom, speaking of a water-spout which a soldier melted to make into bullets, that the workman who had placed it there did not imagine that it would kill some of his descendants.

" Thus it is, madame (for so it is proper to begin in order to give full philosophical weight to one's phrases), thus it is that when I was tranquilly taking tea and talking sense with you last week, I did not suppose that I would commit with all my sense a huge absurdity ; that ennui, awakening love in me, would cause me to lose my head, and that instead of departing for Bois-le-Duc, I should depart for England, almost without money and absolutely without object.

" Nevertheless, that is what happened, in the most singular manner. Last Saturday at seven o'clock, my conductor and I set out in a little chaise which jolted us so badly that we had not gone half a league before we could endure it no longer, and were obliged to return. At nine, upon our arrival in Paris, he started to find another conveyance to carry us to Holland ; and I, proposing to pay my respects to you one more evening, since we were not to leave until the following day, returned to get a coat that I had forgotten. I found on my table the cool and laconic note of the discreet Jenny. This letter, the gloomy regret at leaving her,

[1] The letters to Mme. de Charrière were owned by the late M. Philippe Godet, who obtained them from E. Gaullieur, the son of Mme. de Charrière's companion, Mlle. L'Hardy. Many of them have been published in articles by Sainte-Beuve and by Gaullieur, and later by M. Godet in his biography of Mme. de Charrière. M. Rudler has printed a large number never before published.

1787 the vexation at having failed in the affair, the recollection of some touching conversations which we had together, threw me into a profound melancholy.

" In turning over some other papers I found a letter from one of my relatives which, in speaking of my father, described his unhappiness because I was not settled, his anxieties about the future, and reminded me of his desire for my welfare and the interest he took in it. I saw myself, poor devil, having made a failure of all my projects, more bored, more unhappy, more weary than ever in my sad life. I pictured to myself this poor father fooled in all his hopes, having for consolation in his old age only a man in whose eyes at twenty all was hopeless, without activity, without desires, plunged in the gloomy silence of repressed emotion, unable to surrender to impulses of hope which revive and fortify one.

" I was discouraged ; I was in agony ; I wept. If I had then my comforting opium, that would have been the right moment to consummate in honour of ennui the sacrifice lost to love.

" A crazy idea occurred to me ; I said to myself, Away, live alone, no longer be the cause of a father's unhappiness or any one's ennui. I lost my head ; I gathered together in haste three shirts and some socks and I left without any other coat, waistcoat or breeches or handkerchief, than what I had on. It was midnight. I went to one of my friends in the hotel. I made them give me a bed there. I slept there, a heavy sleep, a horrible sleep, until eleven. The image of Mlle. P——, embellished by my despair, pursued me everywhere. I rise; a saddler who lived opposite lends me a chaise. I have horses engaged for Amiens. I shut myself up in the chaise. I depart with my three shirts and a pair of slippers (for I had no shoes with me), and thirty-one louis in my pocket. I went at top-speed ; in twenty hours I had covered sixty-nine leagues. I arrive at Calais, I embark, I arrive at Dover, and I awake as from a dream.

" My father furious, my friends amazed, those not concerned shrieking in chorus. I alone, with fifteen guineas, without a servant, without clothes, without shirt, or credentials, behold my situation, madame, at the moment of writing you, and never in my life have I been less uneasy. . . ." (Dover, June 26, 1787.)

Having taken this original method of atoning to his stricken parent for his misdeeds and failures, Benjamin now determined to issue an ultimatum of his own. He accordingly wrote his father demanding that he either provide him at once with a wife, " young, of a passable appearance, with a moderate fortune, sufficient intelligence not to talk nonsense without knowing it, sufficient deportment not to make a fool of herself like me, while knowing perfectly well that I do it ; with breeding and education that will

not disgrace her children" ; or, failing this, that he give him a 1787
portion of his mother's dowry with which to proceed to America, the Mecca of all aspirants after freedom and fortune, where he might become naturalized and acquire at last a "country, interests, a career, fellow-citizens." "I would as lief live without a shirt and without money, as I am actually doing, as without a wife and a country."

Pending Juste's reply, he made his way to London, where he had an unexpected encounter with some old college friends, and sundry adventures in the more or less unsuccessful pursuit of loans. The purchase of two dogs and a monkey did not serve to relieve his financial embarrassments.

"I brought these splendid purchases home to my lodgings, but I soon fell out with the monkey. I was moved to whip him for punishment. He was so displeased at this that, although he was a very small monkey, I could not master him, and I carried him back to the shop where I got him, where they gave me a third dog in his place. I was soon disgusted with this menagerie and sold two of the dogs."

The remaining dog accompanied him throughout his wanderings, and he finally bestowed him, much exhausted, upon his friend Kentish (who had declined to accommodate him with a loan with which to get home), with this injunction: "You treat your friend like a dog ; treat this dog like a friend ! " [1]

Newmarket, with its reputation for racing and gambling, offered a momentary hope of replenishing his lean purse, but he had not struck the correct season for these attractions, and "there wasn't a soul there." A weary walk of twenty-eight miles to Wadenho in search of a clerical friend of his father's who might be counted upon to put him in funds, was fruitless, for the person was absent ; and then it was that a happy inspiration suggested that he seek his old friends in Edinburgh. "Beautiful illusions of youth ! " he wrote in after years. "In my twentieth year nothing seemed simpler to me than to say to my friends, 'I have come three hundred leagues to sup with you ; I arrive without a cent ; invite me, make much of me, drink with me, thank me and lend me money to get back.'" Mounted on a little white horse, which was "horribly ugly and very antique," and was moreover, if not stolen, at least borrowed under a misrepresentation, he set forth on his adventures in truly quixotic form. Light-heartedly he

[1] Benjamin's fondness for horses and dogs appears often in his letters.

1787 journeyed, and spent the first night at Keltern[1] in Leicestershire, where he began for the first time to experience that joy of independence and bliss of solitude for which he had longed. Hitherto his wanderings had lacked an object, but now, with the vision of Edinburgh and his friends at the end, "the whole way was delicious." The country through which he rode—Derby, Buxton, Kendal, Carlisle—was "a garden." The excellent roads, the clean inns, the prosperous, intelligent, thrifty appearance of the inhabitants, was a source of perpetual pleasure. At first his sorry outfit made him shy of the inns, but he soon found that there, "where the rights of the individual on the one hand and the differences of rank on the other, are most respected," you were sure to be well received, if you had a horse, as a probable commercial traveller. Benjamin had imbibed enough of Rousseau to flatter himself now that he yearned to get nearer to the common people, to study them as if he were one of them, but in spite of his shabby clothes he could not disguise the air of a broken-down gentleman which his spectacles gave him, the effect of which on the peasants he tried to cultivate was unfavourable to any intimate intercourse. "The people love their equals, but they hate poverty," was his shrewd conclusion, "and they hate the nobility. So when they see a gentleman who looks poor they insult him or they shun him." And in truth, his democracy was at that time very superficial. "When I am tired and when my linen is dirty, which happens sometimes, and which distresses me more than anything else—and when a hard rain soaks me through, I say to myself, 'Ah, how happy I shall be this autumn, with white linen and a carriage and a dry, clean coat!'"

At six o'clock on the evening of August 12 he arrived in Edinburgh, with nine shillings in his pocket, and at once looked up his friend Wilde, whom he had notified of his intended visit. In two hours he was in the midst of his old circle, many of whom were still in the city, and who greeted him with transports of delight and unqualified approbation of his joyous adventures. He spent a fortnight among them—a fortnight of uninterrupted celebration—his friends vying with each other in his entertainment. It was Wilde who, although far from affluent himself, collected the ten guineas necessary for his return journey to London. "Who would have believed that in ten years he would be strapped down to a pallet?" exclaims Benjamin in narrating their parting. Benjamin set forth once more in high spirits, and the enjoyment

[1] Cheltern?

he had experienced in reviving these associations led him to make 1787
a detour in search of a family named Wauchope whom he had known at Niddrie, and even to track a particularly unprepossessing and crabbed sister Wauchope to the little village of Moffat, where she now dwelt. The sour spinster's heart was so melted by this tender attention that she volunteered to introduce him to the beauties of the Lake Country, and accompanied him part way on that pilgrimage.

To see England as a tourist had not hitherto entered into his plans. He lacked the curiosity and the kind of imagination that are essential to the enjoyment of sight-seeing. Moreover, it must be remembered that the Lake District had not yet been discovered by Baedeker, and that the school of poets which bears its name had not yet made it celebrated. The Lyrical Ballads were not published until 1798. The high-priest of nature worship was still a schoolboy at Hawkshead, and Constant, who never cared for poetry nor rhapsodized over nature, would have been as contemptuous as the Edinburgh reviewers could he have been acquainted with the work of Wordsworth and his brother poets. For Benjamin was æsthetically a child of the eighteenth century, and primroses by the river's brim had no message for him. A copy of the death sentence of Charles I., with the signatures of the signers, which he saw at Keswick, thrilled him more than the mists that shroud Helvellyn or the hills that encircle Windermere. The thrift and neatness of English villages pleased him because they bespoke prosperity, but he missed the peculiar charm of the landscape. "The pretty parts resemble Switzerland a little," he wrote. "High mountains with their summits wrapped in clouds instead of snow; lakes sown with verdant isles; fine trees, pretty villages and two or three neat and pretty little towns." And yet somehow these lovely lakes and hills do manage to creep into his letters and take hold of his soul in a way no other scenery ever seems to have affected him. "Seventeen years ago," he wrote in the *Journal Intime*, "I was wandering alone over the counties of England. It was on this journey that I discovered the immense joy of solitude. To-day I am far from all that." The exuberance of this irresponsible, roving life broke through his habitual pose of cynicism and ennui, and his letters to Mme. de Charrière, written, as Rudler puts it so felicitously, *at full gallop*, buoyant with the spirit of the open road, of health and adventure, are the record of the only time in Constant's life when he really seems to be normal and natural. As he "rushed along on foot, on horseback and in all sorts of ways,"

1787 he found opportunity to fill many sheets with his scribblings interspersed with quotations and allusions, of which only a selection can be given here :

" 18 Miles from Patterdale, Ambleside,
August 31.

" I stayed at Patterdale until the 30th. I have not been to Keswick yet ; I shall be there only to-night, and I shall leave to-morrow morning to continue straight on my route, which the lakes of Westmorland and of Cumberland have interrupted. I have just experienced a kind of cyclone on Windermere, a lake, the largest of all those in this region, two miles from this village. I had a desire to drown myself. The water was so black and so deep,[1] that the certainty of an instant repose tempted me strongly ; but I was with two sailors who would have fished me out again ; and I do not wish to drown myself, as I poisoned myself, for nothing. I begin not to be any too sure what is to become of me, having barely six *louis* ; the rented horse will take three of them. I do not want to draw money on my father's banker in London any longer. My friends are not there. *I'll just trust to fate.*[2] I shall sell, if some happy chance brings some good friends across my path, my watch and everything that could bring me something to live on, and I will go, like Goldsmith, with a viola or an organ on my back, from London to Switzerland. I will take refuge in Colombier,[3] and from there I will write, I will parley, I will marry ; then after all these ' wills ' I will say, like Pangloss after he had been flogged and hung, ' All is well.' "

" Fourteen Miles from Ambleside, Kendal,
September 1.

" It is a singular letter, this one, madame—I don't know when it will be finished—but I am writing to you, and I do not weary of this pleasure as of others. Behold me thirty miles from Keswick, where I have seen my man. I have twenty-two miles more to go, and I will write you from Lancaster. The description of Patterdale is in my portmanteau—and I cannot unpack it.—I will send it to you from Manchester, where I shall sleep to-morrow. I am going by long stages for economy, and from impatience.—One wearies of getting weary as of reposing, madame. To vary my letter I am sending you my epitaph.—If you don't hear of me by a month from now, have a stone put up for me under the four lindens between Le Désert and La Chablière, and have the following

[1] Rudler points out that this line is a parody on a famous passage in *La Nouvelle Héloïse.*

[2] Italicized words are English in the original.

[3] Mme. de Charrière's home on Lake Neuchâtel.

inscription engraved upon it; it is bad poetry, and I beg you to 1787
show it to no one while I am still in the flesh. Many things are forgiven the dead; nothing is forgiven the living.

In Memory of
HENRI BENJ. DE CONSTANT REBECQUE
Born at Lausanne in Switzerland,
November 25,[1] 1767,
Died at.....in the County of.....
England,
The.....September 1787

Rash captain of a fragile bark
O'er unknown seas the storm I braved;
Above my head the thunder raved,
Undismayed its din I mark.
My vessel is wrecked, ended my strife.
I leave unregretted my languishing life,
I have ceased to suffer in ceasing to live.
From the heart of the haven the storm I descried,
But lured from shore on the waters wide,
'Gainst the tempest's wild fury I could not strive.
O'er th' angry waves I saw shipwreck ride,
I saw it coming but could not hide.
A wise man would know how from danger to fly.
Without complaint and without pride,
I know how with courage to die.[2]

Not entirely without pride, however, madame, I commend to you the epitaph."

"Twenty-two Miles from Lancaster,
the same day.

"My plans for America, madame, are more determined than ever. If I do not marry nor hang myself this winter, I go in the spring.—I have to see Dr. Adams[3] before leaving London, to get still more information; and if the demon of constraint and suspicion[4] will not quit my poor Désert, I will yield the place to her.—I will borrow of one of my relatives who has already often loaned me money, and who offers me still more (this is not Mme. de Sévery), eight thousand francs, if she has them, and I will become

[1] Benjamin was liable to forget the date of his birth. Elsewhere he speaks of it as October.

[2] Translated by E. W. S. with apologies to B. C.

[3] John Adams was then in England on a mission from the U.S. During the perturbations of the Revolution Benjamin wrote: "If I see all Liberty die in Europe, I shall go to Kentucky and breathe in peace."

[4] Marianne.

1787 a farmer in Virginia. Isn't it delicious to talk of eight thousand francs when I haven't six sous of my own in the world ?

> Sur mon grabat je celébrais Glycère
> Le jus divin d'un vin mousseux ou grec,
> Buvant de l'eau dans un vieux pôt-à-bière.

I quote all wrong, but one of your amiable qualities is to listen perfectly well no matter how one talks.—I again am murdering this phrase, and it's a shame.—If you recall its author, she is my best friend and the most charming woman that I know.—If I did not recall your delight in a misquotation I would offer myself for rent.—Pardon, madame, let us return to my sheep—that is, to our next, which we devour like wolves.

" I reread my letter, madame, after supper, and I am ashamed of all the faults in style and in French, but remember that I was not writing on a very neat green desk, for or near a pretty woman, or a woman who has been pretty, but travelling, not by post over the highways, making fifty-two miles as I did yesterday, but on a wretched horse, with a fearful headache, and having about me only strange beings and foreigners, who are worse than friends and, almost, than relatives. Had I married Mlle. Pourrat I would have had my head upon her knees, upon her pretty hands, and I would forget my woes.—What a fool I am ! Mlle. Pourrat would be upon the knee of Sainte-Croix II., etc. etc. etc., and my head would be a hundred times worse. . . ."

" Twelve Miles from Lancaster,
Garstang, *the 2nd.*

" Speaking of Sainte-Croix, let us speak of Sainte-Croix I. Who is this M. Ségur whose place he takes ? It is not the minister of war, for that would separate him from his fair one—who is it, then ?—you are cruelly brief in your news, madame, yet you know how much I am interested in these young and handsome lovers. (Chosley, 24 miles from Garstang, same day.) This letter is a conversation, madame. I stop to dine and I resume my letter. Henry IV. wrote to his mistress—*My last thought will be of God, and the next to the last of you.*—I who am not Henry IV., and who have the misfortune, but don't mention it, not to believe overmuch in God, I tell you honestly, ' my first thought is of my horse and my second is of you,' or to speak with dignity, measure and feeling —to give piquancy to my thought and to render obscure that which is not obscure, I will say to you (as if I were in one of M. Suard's arm-chairs, or on the platform of the Lycée), ' my first occupation is a duty, the second is a pleasure ' ; beneficent nature compensates one with the other and makes amends to me for the first moment by the moment that follows it.

" You need not be chagrined by the preference which I give

my horse ; without him I would not know how to get to Colombier. 1787
—He is the best beast that I am acquainted with, and yet I am acquainted with many of them.—I remount my beast,—Adieu, madame.—Farewell until twelve miles from here.—I no longer have a headache,—and I have already gone 35 miles to-day. You did not expect that I would weary you three hundred leagues away from you as I did in your room.—It's your fault.—Some king (he was a queer king ; he was almost a man) said to somebody, 'If I knew an honester man than you, I would not choose you.'—And for my part I say to you, if I knew any one more agreeable, more indulgent, more *excellent*, than the *interesting* author of *Caliste*,[1] I would not write you at such length.—Do you realize, madame (pardon me if I continue), that I am in Lancashire, in the midst of the Lancashire Witches, who are the most beautiful women in England and consequently in the whole world ?—I see one of them who causes my pen to drop and my head to spin. . . ."

"12 Miles from Chosley Bolton,
same day.

. . . . . .

"I had thought to finish my letter to-day, madame, but the moment of the crisis has not yet arrived. I will await it. . . .

"*Hills over Hills and Rocks o'er Rocks arise.*

"I think I see your disappointment, madame, on seeing the sheets follow each other with such terrible fecundity. In Westmorland I was almost in your condition. I beheld the mountains rise one above the other, and I despaired of ever seeing the last of them. Nevertheless, be comforted, madame. I swear to you that this shall be the last, and as Fellamar said to Tom Jones, 'To keep my oath I pledge my honour.'"

"15 Miles from Leister, Harborough.

"All goes very badly, madame. I am twenty-eight miles from the place where I am to find my succour. I had asked the man [2] to write me here to let me know if he is at home—I have received no answer.—If he isn't there, all is up, and I do not know what to do.—So goes the pitcher to the water ! Would to Heaven that I could say what Basil did. I would like to write to my father, but I don't know what to say to him in this unpleasant uncertainty. —I am obliged to sleep here on account of my horse.—I shall not spend a more peaceful night—but to-morrow all will be known, perhaps all said (*sic*) and the little stone will be required."

[1] Title of a novel by Mme. de Charrière.

[2] Mr. Bridges, pastor at Wadenho and a friend of his father's, from whom he hoped to get a loan.

1787 "STILL AT HARBOROUGH, *the 6th.*

"The dawn is overcast, the morning lowers
And heavily in clouds brings on the Day
The great, th' important Day, by which the fate
Of Cato and Rome . . .[1]

"I have only twenty miles to go, and in a few hours I shall no longer be anxious, but truly uncertainty is disagreeable. I am more than twenty-four miles from London, and I have not an acquaintance in all this part of England, except this resource. If he is away, what shall I do? If he is there, he is one of my father's best friends, and I am out of difficulty."

"31 MILES FROM HARBOROUGH, WADNO, NEAR OUNDLE, *the 7th.*

"I am with my man, madame! He is not here, but he is expected to dinner, and he will surely be here to-night.—So, madame, whatever be my fate, I am out of my difficulty, more or less, by from ten to fifty *louis.*"

"6 MILES FROM WADNO, KIMBALL, *the 11th.*

"A long silence has succeeded to my garrulity. I am again on the way. You may rightly believe that I am rich again. Rich or poor, I consider your friendship the greatest of my possessions, and close in order not to abuse it.

"H. B. CONSTANT DE R."

Once Benjamin was under the shelter of the parson's roof he forgot the spell of the open road, and the apparition of a displeased parent to be reckoned with on the other side of the Channel loomed large before the uneasy conscience of the young philosopher. Since he was too timid to enlighten his kind host as to the real nature of his trip to England, he was allowed to depart with a loan only sufficient to carry him to London. His fare across the Channel was defrayed from the proceeds of the sale of his horse, of which his friend Kentish relieved him, and he borrowed his way through Calais and Bruges, leaving a trail of debts all the way to Bois-le-Duc. By the time he reached his father's headquarters he was quite scared and meek. He found Juste seated at cards with some brother officers. "Ah! Here you are! How are you?" was the careless greeting he was accorded, and Juste coolly went on with the game. Then, with a glance at the youth's shabby clothes, he said, "That is what I feared from this per-

[1] Opening lines of Addison's *Cato.*

formance"—and then "You must be tired. Go to bed!" Out- 1787
wardly, the affair was closed, and had ended, as Benjamin's dramatic episodes always did, in an anti-climax. It was much worse than if there had been a stormy scene, which would have given an opportunity for explanations and apologies, and cleared the air. Benjamin knew that there would be no further reference to his misconduct, and that one more barrier had been raised between him and this strange, reserved, unknowable father.

Notwithstanding his amusingly self-conscious pose as the forsaken outcast, Benjamin never appears so spontaneous and vivacious as on this vagabond trip, and in reading these letters, we can form a conception of that marvellously witty and brilliant conversation for which he became famous. In so far as his escapade professes to be a social experiment, fruit of Rousseau's teachings then so much in vogue, it is of very little moment. The cult of solitude with Benjamin was always as brief as it was fervid, and his enthusiasm for the simple life ends at bedtime, when he shrinks from sleeping with the peasants and confesses to a preference for clean beds. There is less of Rousseau than of the Picaresque novels and their English progeny—Sterne, Fielding, Smollett—in his boastings of empty pockets and scanty linen, his dogs and dilapidated horse, the aimlessness of his wanderings and the rollicking, careless humour of the road. It is the only time that we shall see Benjamin really enjoying himself, forgetting his rôle of the bored misanthrope, giving free expression to his extraordinary powers of assimilation and reaction. Youth, health, independence, the inspiration of an appreciative audience in his fair correspondent, dispelled for once the habitual cynicism under which his timidity was wont to hide. He had a true artist's enjoyment of the pictures and episodes he created or embellished, of which he was the central figure, and nowhere has he painted so lively and delightful a picture of himself as in these "conversational" letters from England.

CHAPTER V

MADAME DE CHARRIÈRE

(1787–1788)

1787 THERE is nothing to fix exactly the date of Benjamin's meeting with the first of the three women who, as he confessed, strongly influenced, for better or worse, the decisive moments of his life during the next thirty years. The intimacy, begun some time during his second sojourn in Paris, must have ripened rapidly, for his letters to Mme. de Charrière from England in the preceding chapter show easy familiarity, not yet, however, passed beyond the point where he still strove to please and entertain her. Already they had spent whole nights together in animated conversation, for both she and her successor, Mme. de Staël, were, unfortunately for Benjamin, poor sleepers, and turned night into day in a manner very injurious to his weak eyes and excitable nerves. To her hotel in Paris he came regularly from his feverish sessions at the gambling table, and in the intercourse with her, he says in the *Cahier Rouge*:

"I forgot my worries, my father, my debts, Mlle. Pourrat and the whole world. . . . Her conversation, always fluent, forceful, but very original, kept me in a sort of intellectual intoxication which contributed not a little to all the imbecilities I committed at this time. All the opinions of Mme. de Charrière were based on scorn for social usages. We vied with each other in our ridicule of every one we met. We were infatuated with our own wit and our scorn of humanity, and the result was that I put my words into action. . . . In talking to me unceasingly about the stupidity of the human species, of the absurdity of prejudices, in sharing my admiration for all that was bizarre, and extraordinary, original, she ended by arousing in me a veritable thirst to see myself also outside the accepted laws."

Thus he lays at the door of the lady whom Sainte-Beuve has called his first godmother (*première marraine*) the responsibility

MADAME DE CHARRIÈRE

From a portrait in the possession of Mme. de Montmollin of Neuchâtel. By permission of M. Marcel Godet and of Fleischel & Co. of Berlin.

for the escapade described in the last chapter; and accordingly 1740
it was to her that after his frigid reception at Bois-le-Duc he repaired, like a "poor wounded pigeon, trailing its wing."

Isabelle-Agnes-Elizabeth van Tuyll van Zuylen (or van Serooskerken)[1] was born October 20, 1740, in Holland, at the château Zuylen, near Utrecht. She was descended from a distinguished family whose nobility dated from the twelfth century. Her father, who boasted many titles and had filled many important offices, was practically the governor of the province of Utrecht. The family passed the summers at the château of Zuylen, whose steep Dutch gables and turreted corners may still be seen rising in damp and gloomy grandeur from the sluggish waters of the canal which surrounds it like a moat. In winter they moved into Utrecht to a mansion on the crooked, silent old Kromme Neiuwe Gracht. "Sad Utrecht," Belle called it, and she welcomed an occasional visit to the gay world at The Hague as a respite from its stiffness and stagnation. It was on one of these visits that she made the acquaintance of David de Constant, Baron d'Hermenches, whom we have already met at Lausanne, and began a clandestine correspondence with him, which continued for fifteen years. Thus Benjamin was not the first Constant to play an important part in her life.

D'Hermenches, who was Juste's elder brother, and uncle to our Benjamin (who, however, had not yet come into the world), held the rank of Colonel in a regiment then stationed at The Hague. He was a dashing, handsome man of the world, and had already ceased to be interested in the beautiful wife whose acting had afforded Voltaire so much pleasure. Rosalie has described this grand and awesome uncle in the family portraits:

"He wanted to combine every duty, every pleasure, philosophy and voluptuousness, most rigid economy with pomp and magnificence, his wife and his mistresses. He wanted to be by turns, courtier, author, soldier, farmer, scholar and even devotee, although always an Epicurean. . . . He succeeded sometimes, but many things eluded him, and the end of his life was not as happy as the beginning."

In short, d'Hermenches possessed many of the characteristic Constant defects.

When Belle van Tuyll met him at The Hague ball he was thirty-seven and she was twenty. During the fifteen years of

[1] She was fond of signing all her initials, which Benjamin called her "A.E.I.O.U."

1760 correspondence that followed, he played the rôle of *confident*, while she poured out to him her most secret thoughts, weaknesses and desires, with a frankness very startling in a young woman writing to a blasé man of the world. "You are the man in whom I have the most entire and sincere confidence in the whole universe," she writes him. "I have no reserves, no prudery with you." The subject with which her letters are most occupied was marriage, and herself in relation to that institution. The artless expression of her sentiments is a perpetual dance on the tight-rope of decency, and it would seem to be her delight to see how far she can come to the edge without losing her equilibrium. It must have kept her self-appointed confessor in a state of breathless expectancy. "My letters are so free that they are not always decent," she admitted.

A procession of suitors of every nationality and of every degree approached, but never were sufficiently zealous to win, this disconcerting young lady. The van Tuylls found it very difficult to marry her. In her weariness of her stupid and limited existence Belle threw herself into the search for a husband with a vivacity and frankness which was unusual, to say the least, but the cleverness and the display of knowledge by which she sought to win her suitors frightened them away.

"I am bored to death," she wrote d'Hermenches in despair. "My energy doesn't know how to expend itself. To be a companion for my mother, to work a little on my embroidery, here is my daily routine. The days are long, the weeks are interminable. The dearth of amusements is immense, and while waiting for marriage one has to live!"

It is a sad little history, that of this very bright, ambitious, restless Dutch girl, who saw the time of love slipping away without bringing her anything, until at the age of thirty she was glad to content herself with the most phlegmatic and commonplace of husbands, whom she literally corralled into matrimony against his better judgment, and, even, his inclination! Benjamin has referred in the *Cahier Rouge* to the collapse of her romantic and ambitious imaginings.

"After many passions, many of which were very unhappy, she married, in spite of her family, her brothers' tutor."

By no means a stupid man, M. de Charrière viewed with trepidation the evidences of Belle's preference for him. Already her warm friend for five years, he understood her well and foresaw the uneasy married life that awaited them. But she waved aside all his

objections and humble protestations, and in January 1771 he announced to his aged father and his spinster sisters in Switzerland his grand and romantic betrothal to this noble and rich lady, who had 1771

"been my friend for seven years and thinking of marrying me for two years. I pointed out to her all the objections to it, but she persists in thinking that she could be happy living quietly with me in Switzerland. . . . It is true that she has too much wit, too high birth and too much fortune for me, but one can't have everything just to one's mind."

In February they were married, and after a visit to Paris, M. de Charrière brought his Dutch bride to his home in the quiet little village of Colombier on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel, not far from the town of that name. The house where Benjamin, not yet out of the nursery, was to pass so much time is still standing, and looks very much as he must have known it—a charming specimen of seventeenth-century Vaudois architecture, surrounded by vineyards and orchards. Through a low arch one passes from the public road to a large court surrounded by a wooden colonnade and adorned with a fountain, and ascends by a spiral staircase to the main entrance in the tower. The windows overlook the garden and orchard, with a little brook, and the gently sloping shores of the lake are dotted with tiny villages and with vineyards. A wonderful avenue of willows leads down to the lake, and a garden on the opposite side of the road to the village is shaded by gigantic chestnut trees. But the dignity of being the châtelaine of this charming spot wore off with the novelty of her surroundings. Mme. de Charrière soon found that Colombier was terribly hot in summer and bleak in winter; the stretches of vineyards were monotonous and the waters of the lake sombre and sad in hue. Nor did the society of Neuchâtel prove more progressive or intellectual than that of "sad Utrecht." The early tea-drinkings and eternal cards were dull affairs for any one with ideas and a fondness for expressing them.

Literature was the outlet which her unsatisfied desires finally sought. After ten years of quiet, amused observation, she began to put her impressions of Swiss society in the form of fiction. *Les Lettres de Lausanne,* published in 1783, was followed by *Les Lettres de Neuchâtel,* and in 1787, by *Caliste.*

"They raised a great storm on the shores of the lake," says Sainte-Beuve, "and especially in the basins of water near by."

1783 The mild ridicule of local customs and prejudices, which embellished the slight framework of a story in all these books, excited such resentment that even a year after the publication of *Les Lettres de Neuchâtel* neither she nor her husband found it pleasant to go to Neuchâtel. Society revenged itself by voting her books immoral, but her originality and force, the grace and delicacy of her style, soon brought her a reputation that extended to France. Mme. de Staël was one of her most enthusiastic admirers, and declared that without *Caliste* she would never have been able to endure the horrors of the Terror. Her plots were generally accused of formlessness, however, and in regard to the charge of immorality, a criticism made by Benjamin after one of her later stories, *Trois Femmes*, had appeared, is much to the point.

"I do not believe these truths are precisely what they call good truths to tell," he wrote her, "but as I desire that everything should be said and discussed, I am far from raising such a hackneyed objection."

Mme. de Charrière was now a middle-aged woman; her health was poor, her nerves, which she had abused by the use of opium, were unstrung; she was disappointed with what life had brought her—so disproportionate to her abilities and ambitions—and her unhappiness was increased by an unfortunate attachment.

"A man much younger than she and of mediocre intelligence," Constant says, "but handsome, he inspired in her a strong devotion. I have never known the details of this passion, but what she has told me, and what others have told me, was enough to make it clear that she had been greatly moved, and very unhappy; that her dissatisfaction with her husband had troubled her inner life, and that the young man having abandoned her for another, whom he married, she passed through a period of terrible despair."

To this period of despair we owe her best literary work, but it ended in several years of invalidism, during which she went from one health resort to another, trying various cures and physicians, including the famous Cagliostro. Throughout this trying time, M. de Charrière exhibited great patience and sympathy, justifying Benjamin's praise of his character as "delicate and noble." His wife had less delicacy, however, and did not scruple to lay bare the incompatibility of their union in a "cruel little book," called *Mistress Henley*, which related the sufferings of a lively, temperamental woman, mated with a calm, cold, methodical husband who had not enough feeling to be even jealous, and whose very for-

bearance aggravated her misery. "He seemed to me too perfect," 1786
she says. "My fancies, my moods, my impatience, were balked by his reasonableness and moderation." So the temperamental wife sank into apathy, and passed her days,

"watching in this glowing season, the leaves appear and unfold, the flowers blossom, myriads of insects fly, crawl, scamper. I understand nothing, but I contemplate, I admire this universe, so populated, so animated. I lose myself in its vastness. Everything is so marvellous, I will not say so wise—I am ignorant of the purpose, I do not know the means nor the end. I do not know why so many little flies are doomed to be the food of this voracious spider, but I observe, and hours pass, without my thinking of myself or of my childish grief. . . . In a year or two I hope that you will hear that I am reasonably happy or that I have ceased to feel."

It was at this stoical attitude toward the married state, as being merely a matter of mutual toleration and of agreeing upon a possible *modus vivendi*, that Mme. de Charrière had arrived when, in February 1786, her patient husband brought her to Paris (where they took an apartment for six months), and the acquaintance with Benjamin began. All that has been related of Mme. de Charrière, her character, history and her views, explains why they at once found a basis of mutual understanding and attraction, which annihilated the twenty-seven years of difference in their ages. If her wit was, as Sainte-Beuve hints, no longer *à la mode*, it was still able to evoke and to appreciate his, which is the important thing in dealing with a young egotist of twenty. Nor was this sprightly dame devoid of a certain amount of physical attractiveness, despite her years, her illness and her unhappiness. At all events, Benjamin appears to have so judged. In April 1788 he wrote her from Brunswick, in acknowledgment of her portrait :

"Your silhouette has not given me a better opinion of Mlle. Moulas' skill than her conversation of her sense. Truly, she has made you look like a fat Dutch country-wife, and she might surely have done better. I know few profiles more expressive than yours, and when you smile, there reigns (I used to gaze at it upon the wall with pleasure when we were together) such a happy mixture of sweetness and vivacity as it was impossible for a person of any feeling or delicacy to mistake and disfigure to the degree that Miss M. has done." [1]

Spirited and brilliant she certainly appears in La Tour's portrait of her in her youth ; confident and pleased with herself, bold,

[1] The original of this letter is in English.

1787 frank, with a keen sense of humour and great capacity for enjoyment, intelligent, animated; but there is no beauty in the high cheek-bones, florid complexion, full lips, aquiline nose and large, prominent, light blue eyes. There is that in her face which recalls the words of one of her friends: "Every one is at ease with you, and that is a frightful thing!" Frightful for a young woman, no doubt, but in a woman of forty-seven it was precisely the quality to invite and secure the confidence of a youth of Benjamin's peculiar temperament.

What did they talk about, during those "days and nights passed together, drinking tea and discoursing upon all subjects with inexhaustible ardour"? All Paris was thrilling over the conflicts between Parliament and the throne, just then, and the nation trembled on the brink of the Revolution, but the bond of their common interest seems to have been, not so much the practical problems raised by the approaching crisis, as their philosophical opinions, their views of life and death. Blind to the fermentation that her witty epigrams were stirring up in the young man's brain, she was ruthlessly strengthening his suspicions of the stupidity and hypocrisy of the human species, and confirming his admiration for the bizarre, the extreme, the eccentric. Novice as he was, he deemed her understanding of his sex phenomenal, and luxuriated in the ease and informality of his intercourse with her, finding her the only person to whom he could say freely, and without embarrassment, everything that came into his head. Plenty of elderly ladies had already undertaken to mould him or to reform him, but she refrained from advice and reprimands, and treated him as her equal in years and experience. She was content to play the *confidente*, trusting in her age and disillusions. And verily, what she got from him, many a younger woman might have been proud to receive. "In marriage I desired Mlle. Pourrat," he has written; "for *esprit* I saw, heard, loved only Mme. de Charrière." Fate had brought him, friendless as he then was, and isolated from ties of family and country—with his morbid sensitiveness to ridicule or to kindness, his extreme susceptibility to all impressions, good or bad, smarting under the injustice and severity of his father, mortified by his own failure to make good—straight to the feet of a very clever woman whose own temperament and experiences enabled her to understand him as no one else ever had, and who needed him as much as he needed her. She might have been a power for good at this critical moment in his career, but unfortunately her disappointment had

taken refuge in a flippant and cynical philosophy, that scorned 1787
all the platitudes and sophisms of current ideals, but had found very little that was positive to put in their place. Instead of correcting his scoffing, bitter attitude towards people and institutions, she confirmed it.

" She was very severe in her judgments on everybody she saw. I was a mocker by nature. We agreed perfectly—but we soon discovered more intimate and fundamental interests. Mme. de Charrière had so original and animated a manner of viewing life, such scorn for prejudice, such force in her thought, and so stern and disdainful a superiority to the common herd, that with my disposition at twenty, odd and contemptuous as I was too, her conversation was an extraordinary pleasure to me. I abandoned myself to it with rapture."

A marvellously brilliant conversationalist himself, Benjamin always delighted in measuring weapons with one who called forth his best efforts. Add to this her willingness to flatter and encourage him in all his pet extravagances and antipathies, and we can see how this clever woman gained her hold upon him. It remained for her to secure this hold by her appeal to his starved domestic affections. In the peace and cosiness of her home at Colombier, in her indulgence of his whims and thoughtfulness for his little comforts, with an affection that combined the passion of a lover and of a mother, she gained and held his devotion during ten years as no other woman, not even Mme. de Staël, ever succeeded in doing.

After his frigid reception by his father at Bois-le-Duc, which has been related in the preceding chapter, Benjamin paid a brief visit to Colombier *en route* to Lausanne. Far from reproving him for his escapade, Mme. de Charrière found it delightfully original, and seconded his proposition to proceed to Lausanne on foot, as being an appropriate sequel to his English wanderings; which, he reflects in the *Cahier Rouge*, would have been an excellent reason for not doing it, and thus recalling to his relatives his resemblance to the prodigal son. Had he not accepted her advice, he might have avoided an unfortunate episode which occurred on the road and which caused a flurry in the family circle. Owing to some unwelcome attentions to his dog from the dogs of a M. du Plessis d'Épendes, an officer of fifteen years' service, and an experienced duellist, whom he encountered on the way to Lausanne, our hot-headed pedestrian challenged the owner of the uncivil animals. The affair made considerable stir, and Samuel de Constant felt

1787 constrained to proffer his services to his scapegrace nephew. In a letter of Mme. de Sévery's we have a glimpse of Benjamin coming to supper with his aunt, in high spirits, and taking her aside, as there were guests present, to give her the correct version of the many rumours about the duel that were current in Lausanne. Du Plessis had a fever, it appeared, and did not keep his rendezvous. Her daughter Angletine wrote Wilhelm, in January, that a later date having been set at Neuchâtel for the encounter, when M. de Charrière "stood as sponsor and father to Benjamin," twelve officers of M. du Plessis' regiment decided that the "combat had been delivered, and that for so trifling offence it was sufficient." They were both slightly wounded, she added, Benjamin in his side and the other in the knee. Thus ended his first duel.

Benjamin passed the autumn at Beau Soleil, his father's estate near Lausanne, but as he was in no mood to conform to the exactions and criticisms of his relatives, and wrote flippantly to Colombier of the ennui he suffered in their society, it is probable that he kept much to himself. An undated letter from Angletine de Sévery to her brother may be typical of the sort of criticism he brought upon himself:

"Benjamin Constant is in the neighbourhood. He came to Rolle day before yesterday . . . I think to buy gloves. He passed and repassed the house without coming in, and the next day he went away from the *Couronne*. When he was on the point of leaving he had a sealed letter sent to my mother in which were two or three graceful phrases about his regret at not having seen us—having, he said, only a moment which by its briefness caused him more pain than pleasure. . . . He has been to see aunt de Chandieu, who mentioned him to us, affecting to speak of 'my nephew' as if she had only this one, and secretly very much pleased that he had paid his respects to her and not to my mother."

One cannot repress a smile at the picture of Benjamin airily sailing past the house behind whose curtains he might be very sure that the ladies were observing his shopping trip, and then dispatching one of his charming notes to his outraged kinswoman!

As has already been said, Samuel's family had been forced by financial difficulties to move to Lausanne in the spring of 1787, and to occupy his brother's property, La Chablière. Sophie La Roche, who visited them there, has described in the journal of her travels in Switzerland[1] the enchanting avenue of plum trees in full blossom, which led up to the terrace in front of the

[1] In 1793.

house, and the fine library, adorned with Charles' famous Chinese 1787
curiosities, where they drank tea from "magnificent Japanese porcelain." She has shown us Rosalie exhibiting her beautiful paintings of flowers, and singing verses set to music of her own composition, and Samuel, working on his novels, the manuscripts of which strewed the house, or relaxed over "beautiful pieces of embroidery" on rainy days when too tired to work. "A reminiscence of the days of the Pompadour," the enthusiastic lady pronounced it, but it made no appeal to Benjamin, sulking at his father's neighbouring estate of Beau Soleil. He was as discontented and morose as Mme. de Charrière herself. His future was still unsettled. According to Charles, there had been some talk in Paris of his entering the service of the Margrave of Anspach, but it had come to nothing. There was also a rumour of his adopting a military calling. Benjamin had no very clear idea of what he preferred unless indeed it were America, but when his father, who had made the acquaintance of the Duke of Brunswick, in connection with some brilliant military exploit of his own, announced to the future apostle of Democracy that he was appointed to the office of under-chamberlain at the court of that prince, there were threatenings of an open rebellion. He had been sick and miserable at Beau Soleil, and now, pleading illness, he begged a delay, and fled for consolation to Colombier. "Ill, perishing, I cleave to the only friend I have in the world," he wrote Mme. de Charrière. He arrived in December at her hospitable fireside, and spent there two blissful months (broken only by a fortnight's enforced sojourn in Neuchâtel, to be nearer a physician), and during this visit her hold upon his affection was cemented by all the domestic comforts and attentions that his lonely life had hitherto lacked. Glimpses of this idyllic communion amid the wintry desolation of Lake Neuchâtel are afforded through the daily notes that passed between them, whether from their beds, in the morning hours, or over the road from Colombier to Neuchâtel, in the period of his temporary banishment. His are in all veins and styles, with greetings, jests or verses, serious, or humorous like the following:

"Poor plaything of the tempest, I have been blown from error to error. Twenty winters have aged my form; a thousand excesses have withered my wit; I have paid for a few brief days of pleasure by whole months of sorrow," etc.

He loved this pose of a worn-out *roué* as much as he enjoyed the part of the hopeless misanthrope, but those who take him

1788 too seriously in this rôle, which later became almost a habit, even an obsession, miss the key to his peculiar nature. Mme. de Charrière understood him perfectly, and they delighted in the interplay of their *esprit*. His valet Crousaz, and the village messenger, whom she dubbed "Iris" and he called "the Ambassadress," were continually on the wing, while he was in Neuchâtel, with parcels and notes, proofs of her latest book for his correction, or novels for him to read, such as Rétif's *Femmes Contemporaines*, that "scurrilous stuff" of which he asked to borrow "several of the first fifty or sixty volumes from M. de Charrière's library."

Mme. de Charrière was at this time writing her *Observations sur la Hollande*, a criticism of the attempt of the Prince and Princess of Orange to change the Stadtholdership of the country into a monarchy, and Benjamin, half in play, occupied himself at the other end of her writing-table with what was to be the germ of his History of Religions, which he was composing on the backs of playing-cards; sometimes stopping to correct or punctuate her manuscript, or to rally her upon some Alexandrines that had crept into her prose. "We had a very merry time," she wrote to a friend. "He read me nothing, not wishing to expose himself to criticism and ridicule as I did."

Benjamin at twenty was far from being the Apollo that he "rivalled with his locks." He had grown like a weed, and his long, lean, cadaverous figure, as preserved for us in the amusing silhouette[1] by Mlle. Moulas, with its mop of dishevelled hair and the spectacles about which he was so sensitive, offers little resemblance to the gushing description by one of his eulogists of the "handsome, blond young man, as remarkable for his beauty as for his brilliant conversation." Thérèse Huber, the wife of one of his friends, gives a different and more sympathetic picture of him as he impressed her about five years later, and although coloured by Teutonic sentiment, it must be introduced here to offset the silhouette, for Mlle. Moulas, who, it will be remembered, had not flattered Mme. de Charrière's portrait, was no admirer of her friend's protégé.

"Of a tall stature, with a certain grace in his awkwardness, noble features, in spite of their unloveliness, a youthful manliness, with pale complexion, and red hair—which I have loved ever since—an ineffectual, world-buffeted creature (*verfehletes, durch die Welt zerstörtes Geschöpf*), but one whose natural inclinations are

[1] Owned by the late M. Godet of Neuchâtel.

Silhouette by Mlle. Moulas.
Original in the possession of the late M. Philippe Godet of Neuchâtel.

so beautiful that the seal of his divinity has never been completely 1788
effaced." [1]

The reader may take his choice of these portraits of Benjamin. Certain it is that he was notoriously careless in his dress and appearance at this period, and he was encouraged in this by Mme. de Charrière, who seems to have regarded it as a mark of genius or originality. In 1795, after he came under the sway of Mme. de Staël, he " spruced up," and a friend wrote Mme. de Charrière from Paris that he had become " the most elegant of all the dandies in the land." When he appeared afterwards at Colombier with his hair curled and his stock carefully arranged, she realized that a new era had begun for him. " You no longer love me ! " was her interpretation of the change.

Amid the unwonted domestic surroundings of Mme. de Charrière's foyer a new life opened to Benjamin, and his affectionate nature unfolded and flowered in emotions of tenderness and gratitude that endeared the memory of Colombier to him for ever. A dreary stretch of homelessness lay between him and his childhood visits to his grandmother, long since dead. He came to love every corner of this new home, " the white table and the other black table, which swallowed up everything, the nights, the lime-blossom tea—the pretty study, so well appointed." His memory lingered wistfully over all these familiar details when he sat solitary and depressed in his Brunswick lodgings.

" Precisely two weeks ago to-day, at this hour, we were seated by the fire in the kitchen, Rose behind us rising from time to time to put little sticks of wood, which she split into even lengths, upon the fire, and we were talking about the affinity that exists between sense and nonsense."

Thus he wrote her on the 3rd of March, and three days later, in one of those *heurals*, as he named the hourly jottings of his thoughts and occupations that he made for her amusement and his own solace, he asked :

" What are you doing, madame ? It is a quarter past six. I can see little Judith coming upstairs and asking, ' Will madame take tea in her own room ? ' You are at your pianoforte, searching for a modulation, your table strewn with a literary chaos, writing one of your pages. You descend your little winding staircase, you glance at my room—you think about me a little. You enter, very pensive . . . and Mlle. Moulas, very affected, tells you about

[1] To Mlle. Rheinhold. January 19, 1806. Quoted by Ettlinger from Ludwig Geiger.

1788 the Princess Augusta or the afflictions of Miss Goldworthy. You take no great interest in them. You talk of your manuscript or of your *Penelope*. M. de Charrière caresses Jaman.[1] The gazette is read and Mlle. Louise[2] exclaims, 'Well, well, well!' . . . (Brunswick, March 6, 1788.)

"I have become so pleasantly accustomed to the society of your papers, of your piano-forte (even though it sometimes bored me), to everything that surrounded you. I so readily acquired the habit of passing my evenings at your side and of supping with the good Mlle. Louise, that I miss all this assemblage of cheerful and peaceful things." (Bâle, February 20–23.)

It was with a heavy heart that after two months in this paradise he started off to assume his new duties at the court of Brunswick. The middle of February, in an unusually severe winter, was not a comfortable season in which to make a long journey by post-chaise. As the elements raged without, and the chaise jolted over the almost impassable roads, Benjamin raged within, at the evil fate which was dragging him away from the cosy fireside at Colombier to the stiff, ceremonious, uncongenial atmosphere of a little German court. He saw in his new position only a fresh device of his father's tyranny and harshness. "Slave of my father, of my relatives—I go to seek a master, enemies, detractors —what is worse, ennui!" His sole consolation was in writing to the friend he had left behind, at every halt in his journey, pouring out everything that came into his head, in his inimitably graceful and humorous style, with all his colossal egotism, his boyish sentimentality, his petulance, his unreasonableness, unblushingly laid bare for her amusement—and his own. A short stop at Bâle gave opportunity for the following:

"The roads are frightful, the wind cold, I am sad—sadder to-day than I was yesterday, as I was sadder yesterday than the day before, as I shall be sadder to-morrow than to-day. It is hard and painful to leave you for one day, and every day is greater pain than the preceding one. . . . All the charms of bad weather, bad post-chaise and execrable roads cannot console me for having to leave you. I owe you much, physically and morally. I have a frightful cold just because I was shut up closely in my carriage. Judge what I would have suffered if, as my friends (alarmed for my chastity and more concerned for my virtue than for my life) desired, I had set off in the midst of my medical treatment! Surely, then, I owe to you my health, and possibly my life. I owe you more, since this life of mine (which is a sad thing most of the

[1] Her pet dog.
[2] Sister of M. de Charrière.

time, in spite of what M. Chaillet [1] says) has been rendered more 1788
agreeable by you, and for two months you have consoled me for the misfortunes of existence, of existence in society and of existence in the society of Marin, Guenille and Co. I count up thus in my carriage what I owe to you, but it is a great pleasure to be indebted to you in all sorts of ways. As long as you live, as long as I live, I shall always say to myself, 'There is a Colombier in the world.' Before I knew you I said to myself, 'If I am bored too much I will kill myself.' Now I say, 'If life is made hard for me, I have a refuge at Colombier.'

"What is Mistriss [2] doing? Do I love her still? You know that it is only for you, in you, by you, and because of you that I love her. I am thankful to her for having helped you to pass some agreeable moments, and for giving you some distraction at Colombier, but if she is *saucy* to you, '*Then she may go a-packing for England again.*' Adieu, you who are better than you think! (I could kiss Mme. de Montrond on both cheeks for that expression.)" (Bâle, February 20–23, 1788.)

As he proceeded on his journey away from the spot where, "in spite of the two or three little clouds that arose and dissolved every day" (whatever they may have been), he had found peace and calm, he began to give himself up to all sorts of suspicions and resentments and rebellions against his father and his relatives, and with them Marianne, to whose greed and ill-humour he attributed much of the "persecution" of which he imagined himself to be the victim.

"I see myself the slave and puppet of all who should be—I will not say my friends (God preserve me from profaning this name by even desiring that they should be)—but my defenders, if only out of regard and decency. Ill, dying, I fly to the only friend I have in the world, and they begrudge me the comfort of suffering near her and away from their calumnies, insults, reproaches! . . . I waited till I could take without danger a long journey, which I undertook solely out of obedience, and against which, had I been the unnatural child they accused me of being, I could at twenty have raised objections; I wanted to save for this father the shadow of a son he might have loved!"

But the thought of her chased away his melancholy. "Adieu, charming Barbet" [3]; "Adieu, a thousand times good, a thousand times dear, a thousand times beloved,"—this is how he closes; and

[1] Protestant pastor at Colombier, whose diary is an important source of information about Mme. de Charrière and her circle.

[2] Mrs. Cooper, sister of Mlle. Moulas.

[3] His pet name for her, while hers for him was "White Devil."

1788 if there was anything else needed in these boyish "Jeremiads," as he called them himself, to disprove the insinuations of Sainte-Beuve as to the nature of his relations with Mme. de Charrière, it would be found in these very terms of endearment. This is not the tone of a lover addressing his mistress, and although we may suppose that "charming Barbet" treasured these pretty phrases with a more than maternal glow, and was very proud of the homage of her young knight, yet her keen wit could never have been fooled for an instant into mistaking them for anything warmer. Yet he has indicated that his relatives were scandalized at his prolonged residence under the roof of Mme. de Charrière. Sainte-Beuve says they "thought him in the island of Calypso and they felt they must rescue from her spell this already damaged Telemachus." Benjamin answered some of the rumours that had been disturbing his aunt de Chandieu, after he reached Brunswick :

"Two gentlemen from Lausanne have filled themselves up with delightful stories about the length of my visit at Colombier. They have even reached me here, and if I were not so far away, I would have presented my acknowledgments to them. But as this would be useless and difficult at present, I confine myself to assuring you, my dear and kind aunt, that there is not a word of truth in these gentlemen's stories, that the whole thing is a parcel of malicious little lies, and that my reasons for staying at Mme. de Charrière de Tuyll's were entirely different from those the gentlemen, who knew that they were false, had the goodness to attribute to me." (April 11, 1788.)

The chief offender in attributing something warmer than friendship to their intimacy was Marianne, "Dulcinea" as he nicknames her. "Her expressions were indecent, her reproaches out of place, her style insolent," he writes to Barbet :

"If it had been only impertinence and lack of sense, bitterness and ill-humour and all that the pedagogical affection of a sour old maid involves, I would perhaps endure these whims—but one part of her conduct is inexcusably stupid or darkly wicked, and I cannot forgive it. She knows that I am attached to you, and even has pretended jealousy in order to appear sentimental. Let it pass that she writes to you for enlightenment on that absurd story which she had the meanness to believe. Let it pass also that she writes me a very vulgar and involved letter. . . . I do not believe that anything but a mad woman or a vixen could carry on so." (March 16, 1788.)

In the *Cahier Rouge* he has dismissed the possibility of the existence of any tender relations between them : "She was twenty

years older than I, so that her husband was not troubled at our intimacy. He was delighted, and encouraged it all he could." 1788
The two men were on excellent terms. M. de Charrière had loaned Benjamin money, intervened with Mme. Pourrat in his behalf, acted as second in the Duplessis duel, was frequently a member of their tea-drinking parties, and is always affectionately remembered in Benjamin's letters. " I am always afraid of wearying him with my thanks," Benjamin writes. " His manner of doing a favour is so simple and unaffected that one feels it would be very easy to presume upon his kindness." There was not one atom of meanness in Benjamin, and he would have been incapable of abusing the confidence and hospitality of a kind and simple man like M. de Charrière, even had other conditions favoured a *liaison*. His friend Barante, who had his confidence in after years, thus speaks of Mme. de Charrière : " She was twice his age ; he was not in love with her, no intimate bond attached them, but he saw her every day, and their mutual confidence was pleasant." In *Adolphe* she is referred to among the early influences that formed him : as

" An aged woman, a friend of my youth, dissatisfied and lonely, her mind her only resource, and fond of analysing everything with her wit. For nearly a year, in our inexhaustible conversations, we examined life in all its phases, with death always for the conclusion of the whole matter. . . . Having, at the outset of her career, been cast into a world she did not understand, with the consciousness of great power of soul and of truly great faculties, . . . because she refused to bend to artificial but necessary conventions, she had seen her hopes deceived, her youth pass without pleasure, and old age at last had touched without subduing her."

Plainly those who are trying to make a Mme. de Warens out of *Barbet* are wide of the mark. The frank and cynical Benjamin would have been the last to deny such an intimacy, had it ever existed. Naturally the difference of sex counted for a good deal in their intercourse, but to the youth of twenty this woman of fifty-seven was, and remained, " aged," and the pleasure he derived from her society was largely intellectual. " *Amitié Épistolaire*," it has been called ; *Amitié Amoureuse*, it may have bordered upon at times, but it is probable that at that period *Amitié Maternelle* played the largest part in the attraction she held for him. For her, the attachment was bound to increase as her interests in life narrowed and concentrated. Her maternal instincts gave her a passion for forming and directing him, and she finally developed

1788 a fatal disposition to tyrannize. On his side, on the other hand, her spell was destined to weaken, as his horizon widened and his interests multiplied. For, after all, she belonged to the age that was passing away, and he, despite his eighteenth-century education, was a child of the new era. Yet had she been content with what he freely accorded her, she might have retained his devotion to the end, for he was, as has been said, singularly tenacious of old ties. But the autocratic spirit of old age, intensified by her invalidism, took possession of her early, and she made the unpardonable mistake of nagging him. She allowed him to see that she intended to monopolize and rule him. Few young men would have submitted to this; the skittish Benjamin was off like a colt at the first hint of it. But at the time we are now considering no shadow had yet fallen on the happiness and confidence of their intercourse, and Benjamin was perfectly ready to turn himself inside out for her benefit, during that wonderful year of 1788, which was the high-water mark of their friendship.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE COURT OF BRUNSWICK

(1788–1789)

THE Duchy of Brunswick, which was to be the scene of 1788
Benjamin's bondage for the next two or three years, was ruled by a man who played an important part in the military history of his time. Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick, was the head of the Prussian army in Holland, and this explains how Juste Constant knew him, and how he was able to obtain an appointment for his son at the court. He was a nephew of the great Frederic, and had distinguished himself in his uncle's service during the Seven Years War. He was, however, ambitious to excel not only as a soldier but as a ruler, and as an all-round man of culture and of affairs. Mirabeau, while praising his French as better than that of an Academician, has also noted the almost affected precision of his speech, and a certain hesitation arising from a desire to express himself elegantly and accurately. He also laid great stress on etiquette and ceremony, saying with a profound reverence to each visitor who was presented to him, "I am your very humble and obedient servant." Distasteful and ridiculous as all this sort of formality was to Benjamin, he nevertheless learned to respect and admire "my Duke" as he called him. "He is very superior to the ordinary princes," he wrote his aunt. "He has extensive information, much intelligence and a very firm character. His conversation is affable, with variety and piquancy, and he would be the chief man in his court, were he not the master. I consider myself fortunate to be attached to him." Probably all this insistence upon ceremony at the court was a matter of custom rather than of taste with him, for according to the Abbé Baron (who was tutor to a young *émigré* at Brunswick from 1789–91), the Duke was most at home in a military atmosphere, and was always in boots and uniform. The Abbé says that, while entertaining a high respect for all industrious,

1788 learned and serious workers in his Duchy, he held in great disdain the merely decorative court functionaries, esteeming them lower than his lowest soldiers, and treated them with supreme indifference as if he said, "Aren't you ashamed, well-made young chaps that you are, with two feet, two arms and broad shoulders, to be giving yourselves to the service of one man, that is to idleness and non-entity, when you should be serving your country?" Among these idle nonentities poor Benjamin was numbered, and probably none of them felt so keenly the absurdity of his position.

The Duke had succeeded to a patrimony badly crippled by debts and industrial depression, but under his management it became prosperous and attracted merchants from all over Europe, until the battle of Jena checked its development. His reputation as an administrator and as a soldier was not confined to his own realm. In 1790, when Louis was giving a new constitution to the French people, Duke Ferdinand was invited to become the general of the French army, as being one who, by his military standing and his sympathy with the ideals of the people, would be acceptable to the Girondists. He, however, declined the honour, pleading duties to Prussia and the Empire, as he also declined later the secret offer of the crown of France in one of her political crises. But his popularity with the friends of the Revolution was at an end after his indiscreet proclamation [1] holding the people of Paris responsible for the safety of their King; an act which the Queen described as a death-warrant for their Majesties, since it gave the Jacobins a pretext for the deposition of Louis. Henceforth he fought with the enemies of the Revolution, in command of the Coalition forces against Bonaparte. In January 1794, after the Duke's brilliant manœuvres in covering the Austrian retreat from Lindau, Benjamin wrote proudly to Rosalie, "The way this campaign has ended is bad for the Coalition, but covers my Duke with glory. He alone has saved the armies of Germany and Austria."

Thus Benjamin was at least fortunate in serving a prince whom he could respect, and of whom he could speak as a "great man," who governed his people "as equitably as if this great man were merely just." In 1794 he wrote to Mme. de Nassau, "My Duke has established in his states the unrestricted freedom of the

[1] When Benjamin was a Deputy in the French Chamber, his Royalist enemies accused him of being the author of this Proclamation. It was, however, drawn up by the Council of Princes. It is said that the Duke signed it reluctantly and regretted it ever after.

press. He is putting his University on the best possible footing. 1788
In short, he is distinguishing himself by all the moderation, wisdom, liberal principles and progressiveness that can be asked of a man. It is pleasant to be in his service."

The Duke had married an English princess, a sister of George III., who had never laid aside her English habits and sympathies. They had four sons, none of whom were normal or promising children. Three were half-blind and also feeble-minded (a condition popularly ascribed to an enthusiasm for cold baths), and one was a hunchback. The court gossip was enriched by stories of their awkward mistakes, their near-sightedness and stupidity. The heir to the Duchy, who is described by the Abbé Baron as " big and fat as a hogshead " and " not as imbecile as his brother, but a bigger fool," was married to a daughter of the Prince of Orange, who was much beloved, but who later became Benjamin's implacable enemy. The fourth son of the Duke, notwithstanding his infirmities, became a brilliant soldier and won fame in arms against the French. He it was who, returning from England, where he had fled from Napoleon, succeeded to the Duchy after the battle of Leipsic. He died at Quatre-Bras—a fortunate thing for the country, observed Count Mérode in his *Souvenirs*. There were also two daughters, one of whom became Queen Caroline of England, whose career is well known ; the other, the Duchess of Würtemburg, died the year Benjamin went to Brunswick. The former daughter was not in Brunswick very much during Benjamin's residence there, and when in 1814 she met Charles de Constant at a ball in Geneva, she mistook him for his cousin, saying, " It is a long time since we have met, M. de Constant ! " " A little woman of forty, enormously and sluggishly fat, once a blonde but now a brunette, with an enormous black wig and brick-red spots of rouge on each cheek," is Charles's description of her ; but Mirabeau, who knew her in her youth, called her " amiable and lovely," and Baron even says " pretty."

Brunswick in Benjamin's time was an ancient and sombre town of mediæval aspect, possessing a castle, which had been the favourite residence of Henry the Lion, and the cathedral where he was buried. In the Burg Platz hard by, Benjamin must have passed daily the archaic bronze lion which symbolized Henry's supremacy, and grown familiar with the statues of his descendants on the pillars of the beautiful Gothic Rathaus ; he may have had his lodgings in one of those fine old timber-carved houses, in the narrow streets of the Altstadt, where the proud but im-

1788 poverished aristocracy still dwelt. But the symbols of Absolutism and of force made no appeal to his enthusiasm, fresh as he was from the Whig influences of Edinburgh, and his letters reveal no emotion, æsthetic or historic, derived from the contemplation of these monuments. The picturesque old town had little fascination for his type of mind. His only reference to its topography relates to the ramparts (now levelled for a promenade) which encircled it, to which he fled from his own ennui and from the icy streets of the city—" that *mer de glace* " where his horse could scarcely stand. Here he could at least find a footing for his steed in the " mud, a foot deep," which covered the ramparts, but he saw little to please the eye in the surrounding ditches where the filth of the town was emptied. " Brunswick is a circle," he wrote Mme. de Charrière, after one of his early expeditions, " and I, who have little knowledge of the streets, and who have a mania for not asking the way, turned around in the town for at least an hour and a half, and could reach home only by revolving; see how I got home ! "

His presentation at Court, which followed soon upon his arrival, did not dispose him to judge any more leniently the city where he was to begin his official life, and he confided to Mme. de Charrière the disagreeable impressions that he politely veiled from his aunts.

" You have no *adequate idea* of the ennui of this city. There is something so dull in its very aspect, something so glacial in its inhabitants, something so spiritless in their *intercourse together*,[1] something so unsociable in their outlook; they have neither court intrigues nor romantic intrigues, nor libertine intrigues. . . . Even the firs of this country are twisted, dwarfed and ugly." (March 21, 1788.)

On his arrival in Brunswick, Benjamin probably stopped at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, which, unlike the inns that Baron found so dirty and uncomfortable, was large and handsomely furnished, and by far the best hotel in the city. Here the Brunswick Club had its headquarters, which included in its membership all the nobility and professional men, and was the centre of the social life outside of the court. The Club was especially hospitable to strangers, and Benjamin would naturally have availed himself

[1] Italicized words in this and the following letter are English in the original.

of its privileges very soon. Later he established himself in per- 1788
manent lodgings. On March 3, he wrote :

" I have taken lodgings to-day and wish to lend them greater charm by writing to you. I have the prettiest apartment in the world. I have a room in which to receive the people who come to pay court to His Highness' Gentleman-in-Waiting ; I have a little boudoir in the German style, where one can't see very well, but that is sometimes a fortunate thing ! I have a very pretty room for writing and a harpsichord on which I am constantly playing, from *Pour vous j'ai soupiré, je voulus*, etc., to *L'amant le plus tendre*, the air of which I have completely forgotten, although I remember the words perfectly. I have a writing-desk . . . which I have arranged in a manner that gives me extreme pleasure. In one of the drawers I have put all the parts and introduction to my great and magnificent works ; in the others I have put all your letters. . . ."

Having come to Brunswick determined not to like it, and animated by a deep disdain for courts and courtiers and for all things German, Benjamin of course found himself to be a square peg in a round hole. It was Mme. de Staël who said that he could always get fun out of bores ; but an appreciative audience was indispensable to his wit, and as he lacked that in Brunswick he merely drew more and more into himself.

" I neither enjoy myself nor am bored," he wrote. " I have made the acquaintance of some literary men, and I intend to profit by their libraries much more than by their conversation. The Germans are ponderous in their arguments, in their dullness. Their gambols resemble the prancings of the Duchess's carriage horses. They are always *puffing and blowing when they laugh*, and think they must lose their breath in order to be gay, and lose their balance in order to be polite." (March 9, 1788.)

His horse was his only resource. " Though a little lively, he is not suspicious," he said, " and I know so many suspicious beasts who are not lively, that this contrast prejudices me in his favour more than I can tell. Excellent beasts—horses ; I owe them so, so much ! "

One of the first social functions to which he was bidden was the weekly masked ball, where he was " moderately bored."

" All the court was there, I had to go. For seven mortal hours, wrapped in my domino, a mask on my nose and a fine hat with a lovely cockade on my head, I sat, sprawled, roasted, promenaded. ' You not dance, M. le Baron ? ' ' No, madame.' ' Der Herr Kammerjunker tanzen nicht ? ' ' Nein, Eure Excellenz.' ' Your

1788 Serene Highness has danced much?' 'Your Serene Highness enjoys dancing?' 'Will your Serene Highness dance again?' 'Your Serene Highness is indefatigable!' At about one o'clock I was seized with a colic of ennui and I left before the others. My stomach is much weaker than I supposed, but by doubling the doses gradually it is to be hoped that it will gain strength."

The Count de Mérode-Westerloo, who was in Brunswick a few years later than Benjamin, was dazzled by the gaieties of this little Court, which he thought "brilliant." There were three or four dinners weekly, *casinos* or informal balls, given by the Duchess, "to say nothing of her grand balls, to which you must be certified eligible in order to be invited." But the Abbé Baron, whose visit coincided more nearly with Benjamin's, was less enthusiastic. The Court did not dance at these balls, he says, but played cards in an adjoining room till ten, when they went home to supper, while the nobles and invited strangers were served on tables brought into the dancing-hall, after which the dancing was resumed. English dances were *de rigueur* owing to the English customs introduced by the Duchess. The Germans were bad dancers, in his opinion, and the nobles smelled of beer and changed their handkerchiefs once a fortnight and their shirts once a month! The dirt and coarseness of the food affected the Abbé very much as it affected Benjamin. "Bad soup and stale bread and quantities of coarse vegetables" revolted his appetite. "When you see a dirty kitchen-maid with a platter of food for the family, you think she is going to feed the pigs." The Abbé adds that there was also a concert every week which no one attended, for the Duke, in his economies in order to pay off his father's debts, had cut down the number and quality and splendour of the performances, which were given in a hall dismally lighted by little chandeliers of eight candles, that were so short that they often burned out before the performance was over. The singers were Italian, in imitation of King Frederic William of Prussia, who, after the death of Frederic II., had replaced the French troupe at Berlin, by Italians. Benjamin found the fortnightly operas very tame: "Three actors and three actresses, one of whom is blind and has a wooden leg, and no one comprehends a word, for there are not two persons in the audience who know Italian."

The dinners at the Court, however, were more lively. The Dowager Duchess was sprightly and a great talker, interested in religion and philosophy, after the fashion of the Court at Berlin, where she had received a French education and thus learned the

refinements of life and manners. She set a good table with a gold service, according to the observing Abbé, and kept up considerable state, driving out every day behind her eight fat, cream-coloured horses, with three lacqueys and a *valet de pied*, and preceded by a little dwarf on horseback. The *Duchesse Héréditaire* also held her own court, and when Benjamin arrived, these three courts, that of the Duke, of his mother, the Dowager Duchess, and of his daughter-in-law, the *Duchesse Héréditaire*, offered the only social recreation in Brunswick. It was at the Duke's court that his duties in his office of Gentleman Ordinary (or *extraordinary*, says Sainte-Beuve) were performed. It was his place to keep the strangers who came to be presented to the Duke, in the order of their rank. Arrayed in a coat trimmed with gold lace, he marched pompously in front of them, swinging a gold-headed cane; or at dinner in the absence of the Grand Marshal, he was expected to take them by the arm and place them in the seats they were to occupy. Solemn affairs, these dinners, where the men sat on one side of the table and the women on the other! There was a large amount of bowing and scraping demanded in return for his salary of one hundred and fifteen *louis*, and it is difficult to imagine a more incongruous employment for the future orator and publicist than that of *Kammerjunker* to a stiff little German court. With what grace he performed his part may be judged from the following comment which he overheard and gleefully passed on: 1788

"A few days ago the Duchess, speaking of the Chamberlain's duties which, in truth, consist merely in making people sit in the order of their rank, in the absence of the Grand Marshal, said, to my surprise and confusion, 'It will be very comical to see Constant perform his duties!' What the devil is so funny about that?" (Mme. de Charrière, March 16, 1788.)

His perverse indifference to the effect he produced in his new environment at length elicited a mild reproof from Mme. de Charrière. "What does it matter to me," he replied, "what they think of me? I do not take the trouble to create an 'atmosphere' for myself." But he did create one in spite of himself, and an unfavourable one. He began to notice that the Duke often neglected for days together to summon him to court, and he foresaw that his father's hope for his advancement would not be realized. Before he had been a month in Brunswick, he had given offence by absenting himself from a birthday fête, given for the Duke's cousin, excusing himself by a few careless jests. His indifference was the more injudicious, because he began to suspect

1788 that rumours of his reckless behaviour at Erlangen were reaching Brunswick through the Duke's sister, the Dowager Margravine of Anspach. " She has probably written the Abbess (who said to me one day, ' I have written my sister that we have you with us '), ' Snub that young Constant. He has a viper's tongue ! ' And as snubbing does not require much cleverness or much exertion, they snub me. I have marked it in several little instances." In Benjamin's defiant mood every one was in the general conspiracy to persecute him, and instead of trying to dispel any prejudice by his own affability, he tactlessly confirmed them by his moroseness and *hauteur*. Within a month from the time he arrived he had drawn into his shell, was " seeing almost no one " and was interested in nothing but his own thoughts and his horse, who " took the place of humans." He decided that he was not adapted for society, that he—the future wit of Paris salons—lacked the " gaiety which amuses, and the deference which flatters."

Shortly after his arrival, his social education had been undertaken by a " tall and starched " young Kammerjunker who had, upon introduction, at first left him to languish alone in his corner, but later, on being importuned by a little Maid of Honour who had taken Benjamin under her charge, to show the stranger some attention, had offered to conduct him on a round of visits. This young gentleman called for him every afternoon promptly at half-past four, hat in hand and sword at side, and together they " went slipping and sliding (for it snows every morning and sleets every evening) to pay calls for two or three hours each day." These cold and silent expeditions were terminated every evening by his conductor's notifying him of his intentions for the morrow as follows: *J'aurai l'honneur de fenir vous prendre temain à quatre heures et temie.* This intimacy was not of a nature to endure, and by the end of April either the Kammerjunker must have felt he had fulfilled his obligations, or Benjamin must have rebelled, for he writes :

" Visits I make none, except upon one or two people with whom I can talk and jest about the weather or some such thing. I never *converse* with any one. . . . I walk a great deal, read the history of Germany, read Greek, play a great deal upon the harpsichord, ride half the day, try new horses, make and unmake bargains, never go near a card, or a girl, am often low-spirited, but on the whole, it is well." (April 26.)

And so he rambles on for his own amusement and his Egeria's, filling large sheets with his scribblings and sparrings, interspersed

with English phrases, postscripts, marginal afterthoughts, and even 1788
filling the corners and spaces between the lines with jests, commissions, or with such intimate bits of news as this :

" *March* 9.

" Flore gave birth, day before yesterday, to five little ones, one of which resembles Jaman, with the exception of the black spots on the back of that illustrious dog, which his son has not. He is all white, and has no black except his two ears. I have named him Jaman after his father, and I destine him for *the most liberal education*. . . . I beg you to send M. Necker's book [1] by post, as I have a greater desire that my remarks on that book should appear, than to keep a *louis* in my purse. I beg you to send it immediately. If I had your talent, I would say to you, ' Have M. Necker's book bound, put it between two weights for two hours, tear off the cover and send it to me ; I will consider its two sides carefully, I will criticize the book and I will appear in print.' But as I haven't it, I beg you to send me, vulgarly, the whole book. The idea you suggest to me of seizing the opportunity to outline my own ideas, seems to me excellent. . . . In six months the time will have gone by, while now my remarks may make some stir.

" They continue here to treat me sufficiently well. I dine almost daily, either at the reigning court or at one of the other two. For the rest, I am neither amused nor bored. . . ."

Perhaps Mme. de Charrière did not send the volume in time to catch this mood for political criticism. At all events the project did not materialize.

Ten days later he writes her as follows of a proposed study of Greek civilization, the outgrowth of the translation of Gillies, mentioned in a preceding chapter. Although like so many literary tasks he proposed, this treatise was dropped, the research studies then begun led him in the direction of his great *History of Religions*, which was his life work, and which began in a study of Polytheism.

" *The twentieth of March and the nineteenth day of my tiresome residence in this tiresome country. Ten o'clock in the morning.*

" I am working on my little Greeks with all my might, and I find them, however mediocre they are, much better company than the big Germans around me. But they are not the little Greeks that you know. It is an entirely new scheme, another point of view, other subjects of consideration. What you have read was only a translation, hastily made, to please my father, and which I had never revised, when he insisted on having it printed. What

[1] *L'Importance de la Morale et des Opinions Réligieuses.*

1788 I am doing will be a history of the gradual civilization of the Greeks by the Egyptian colonies, etc., from the first traditions that we have about Greece up to the destruction of Troy, and a comparison of the customs of the Greeks with the customs of the Celts, Germans, Scots, Scandinavians, etc. You see that your criticism of the involved phrases will be rather useless to me; but I will send you some very closely written pages of my actual Greeks, when they are a little further advanced, and I will ask you for the most severe criticism. . . ."

Although he had boasted of the asceticism of his life in his new surroundings, the temptation to gamble was not absent, for he adds:

"Speaking of faro, I have played twice. I did not lose much, but I am afraid of letting myself be carried away by it, and, to forestall all seduction, I send you a solemn pledge never to play another game of chance for five years. You will see all that I swear and all that I invoke to witness my resolution. A pledge by which I consent to lose your friendship if I break it, I will surely not violate.

"I reread my letter and see on the second page a 'with all my might' which unfortunately is not wholly true. I am working on it, but not with all my might; working languidly."

The original text of the pledge he mentions is not extant. Sainte-Beuve has printed it, claiming to have had it from Gaullieur, who said it was written in English on the back of a Knave of Hearts. It is as follows:

"By all that is deemed honourable and sacred, by the value I set on the esteem of my acquaintance, by the gratitude I owe my father, by the advantages of birth, fortune and education, which distinguish a gentleman from a rogue, a gambler and a blackguard, by the rights I have to the friendship of *Isabella*, and the share I have in it, I hereby pledge myself never to play at any chance game, nor at any game, unless forced by a lady, from this present date to the first of January 1793; which promise if I break, I confess myself a rascal, a liar and a villain, and will tamely submit to be called so by every man that meets me. H. B. DE CONSTANT.

"BRUNSWICK, *March* 19, 1788."

How faithfully he adhered to this pledge we do not know, but it implies that Mme. de Charrière had reproved him for his excessive gambling. The early attraction of "chance games" for him has already been seen in his letters to his grandmother. In Erlangen it had brought him into difficulties which continued through the years we have just reviewed. Throughout his life the mania for

play returned at intervals, and was frequently abjured for ever, and 1788
as frequently resumed. He thoroughly recognized the demoralization of his character as well as the effect upon his fortunes and influence, that resulted from this vice, yet his will power was never sufficiently strong to enable him to renounce it for ever. Again and again he notes in his journal his surrender to it, generally adding that he has lost heavily. During the period of his intimacy with Mme. de Staël we do not hear of his playing, and it is probable that the preoccupation of the new interests he was then forming took the place of this other excitement. But when he starts with Charlotte for Germany (1808) we read: "Baden; lured by the gain of five louis, I play and lose like an idiot"; at Wiesbaden, "I play unceasingly and lose unceasingly"; and at Schwalbach, "I pass ten days without working, playing like a madman." During the last years of his life it was well known that he varied the agitations of political contests by those of the gambling table, passing night after night at the clubs thus engaged, and rumour said that he won in this way the money to buy the house on the rue St. Honoré, which entitled him to enter the political arena after the Restoration, as an owner of Paris real estate. Toward the end of his life, when his health was greatly broken, he said to a friend, "I eat my sick food and then I go to the gambling-house." It was not the passion for gain, nor even the need of money, though that was ever pressing, that chained him to such a miserable habit; rather was it a nervous obsession, which, as he grew older and his constitutional depression got a stronger hold on him, plunged him ever more recklessly into the vice he deplored, as an escape from his thoughts and from the fatigue and discouragements of life.

In June he could already enumerate among his Brunswick friends "seven or eight young ladies, one good and amiable woman," and confessed that, whereas he formerly preferred the society of elderly people, he now never talked to any woman over thirty, for the old people he met in Germany were as ignorant as the young ones, and stiff besides. *Virginibus, puerisque canto* is his motto, but in spite of that, no one has yet supplanted in his affection either her, or his "faithful Crousaz," or his "perfectly delightful Jaman, who has more *esprit* than all Brunswick put together, the pattern of dogs and friends." In this inimitable trio (his horse, having twice thrown the valet, and laid down in the water with his master on his back, is in disgrace, and so not included) Mme. de Charrière might be assured that her own position was unique, for he ends his letter, "Adieu, Isabelle, I embrace you

1788 and feel every day more and more that there is no Isabelle here. It is a rôle that doubles do not play." Sainte-Beuve thinks that when this middle-aged lady read that Latin phrase, she must have realized that her star was setting. But, in truth, she had little to apprehend, in competition with what she could offer Benjamin, from the silly little person upon whom his fancy was about to light. Hers was indeed " a rôle that doubles do not play," and it was not until she saw herself superseded by a woman who added to youth the intellectual attraction which was her own largest asset, that she lost her head and missed her play.

When Benjamin first beheld the Court ladies of Brunswick, he declared that he had never met such " rabble " (*vermine*) as the waiting-ladies of the Hereditary Duchess. It was his fate, lonely and depressed as he was, and disposed continually to coquet with the idea of matrimony as the solution of all his problems, to succumb to the charms of one of this " rabble," and to be encouraged in this weakness by no less a personage than the Duchess herself, whose favour the young lady enjoyed. The story of this surrender, as related by him to Böttiger at Weimar many years after, is that, entering accidentally the ladies' sitting-room at the palace, he found Minna von Cramm (who had been " recently reading *Don Carlos* and was rehearsing for the part of Eboli ") in tears ; and that when, in response to his solicitude, she attributed her emotion to her loneliness and yearning for affection, Benjamin, who never could resist the feminine weapon of tears, chivalrously offered himself as a comforter. The following day he asked permission of the Duchess to announce their engagement to the Court. The letter in which he acquainted his " Barbet " with his intention must have been a very pretty one, but the first reference to it that is extant is considerably later.

" Oh, for three hundred pounds a year, my Minna, and a cottage ! . . . My projects for America still go on. Wouldn't it be better to live in Carolina than to beg here ? . . . Adieu, dear Barbet. Love me a little—love my Wilhelmina a great deal, for she deserves it. The more I know her, the more I love her, the more agreeable and reliable qualities I discover in her, the more I feel that there is no happiness, no peace, no living without her." (September 8, 1788.)

It is always a hard moment for a woman who has had the monopoly of a man's devotion and confidence, even if he be not her lover, when she finds that some one else is indispensable to his happiness and peace ; but in justice to Mme. de Charrière it must

be conceded that she appears to have met the ordeal in the proper 1788
spirit.

Wilhelmina Luïse Johanne von Cramm (or Minna, as he always calls her) was the daughter of a Brunswick captain, Karl von Cramm, and of Luïse von Bulow, his wife. She was nine years older than Benjamin, but it was to be expected that a youth of his temperament and tastes would choose an older woman, *Virginibus puerisque* notwithstanding. The Duchess, her patroness, apparently saw in the noble and presumably wealthy young Swiss an excellent partner for the waning charms of her favourite, and readily promised to obtain an advancement for him which would make it possible for them to marry without delay. Wilhelmina's pretensions to beauty were not sufficiently dazzling to encourage her in any higher ambitions. When Rosalie saw her in Lausanne the summer after the marriage, she wrote Charles, "Considering Benjamin's fastidious taste, we expected to find her perfection, and we were astonished to see that she was very ugly, her face pitted by small-pox, red-eyed, and very lean." But although the first impression was unfavourable, Rosalie admitted that on closer acquaintance she proved to possess "a good figure, gentle and agreeable manners, a pretty hand, beautiful hair, a sweet voice, witty and gay, without any of the German stiffness." Benjamin adored her, she added, as much as if she had been a beauty, and she certainly had a good influence upon him.

At first Juste Constant strongly opposed his son's marriage with Minna, less, it appears, because of the disparity in their ages, than on the score of her lack of fortune, for she was not bringing her husband the dowry of a Jenny Pourrat. He even attempted to remove Benjamin from Brunswick and to find him a position at Berlin. Benjamin invoked and obtained the intercession of his Uncle Samuel, but in the end the influence of the Duke proved of more weight. To be sure, the Duke's favour rested on large, vague promises for the future, but at the same time a pledge of good intentions was given in the form of a modest promotion, with the title of Counsellor of Legation, accompanied by an increase of salary, a house, and firewood. Plainly, it was a love match!

But before the marriage could be celebrated, a catastrophe occurred that postponed it indefinitely, and plunged Benjamin from the heights of bliss to the abyss of despair.

In August 1788 the disagreeable relations that existed between

1788 the Bernese and Vaudois officers in the May regiment,[1] of which Juste was colonel, culminated in his loss of a suit that he had brought in the military court to vindicate himself from certain charges, and in his sudden abandonment of his command and mysterious disappearance. The chain of incidents that led to this calamity is complicated for the lay mind to follow, but the trouble lay as much in his own difficult disposition as in the jealousy and insolence of the Bernese officers in the May regiment.

As a result, while Benjamin was courting his Minna, his father was plaintiff in no less than ten military suits, and defendant in two. Juste's mania for lawsuits, whether civil or military, was throughout his life a source of anxiety and embarrassment to his son, but this particular series in which he was now involved so affected Benjamin that it unsettled him in his present prospects, and well-nigh wrecked his career. For the time, his matrimonial plans were completely overshadowed by them, and his thoughts diverted in a quite different direction by the "mass of lesser happenings, light impertinences, avowed insults, open revolts or disguised resistances, shameful calumnies, outrageous accusations, irregular assemblages, illegal leagues and resolutions, clandestine denunciations," by which the officers of the May regiment sought to rid themselves of their colonel. With enemies so strong and determined, it was inevitable that the decisions of the Standrecht should be adverse to Juste, and by adopting the principle of holding the chief responsible for the misbehaviour of his subordinates, they pronounced against him in twelve counts, and with the greatest injustice condemned him to suspension from military duties for six months. Juste was beside himself with rage and shame. On the 17th of August, the day following the final sentence, he suddenly disappeared, leaving his papers in confusion and all his baggage behind him.

A week later Rosalie notes in her journal that they have received the "frightful news" of the decision against her uncle, and of his flight. Samuel, almost prostrated by the news, and straitened for money though he then was, nevertheless set out at once for Holland. He arrived there on the 14th of September, and met his son Juste, who was an officer in the regiment, and the distracted Benjamin. Together they sought the Prince of Orange, and obtained from him some reassuring promises. "If ever I meet the bear[2] May, son

[1] A Bernese regiment named from General May, who had organized it and whose sons were officers in it.

[2] Allusion to the coat of arms of Berne.

of the ass May," wrote Benjamin wrathfully to Mme. de Charrière, 1788
" out of his den, and in a neutral place where I shall be a man and he less than a man, I promise myself without fail to make him repent of his bearishness."

The sense of disgrace, uncertainty as to his father's fate (for no trace of his whereabouts could be discovered), and impending bankruptcy resulting from the disorder in which Juste had left his affairs, had driven poor Benjamin half distracted. A frantic letter to Mme. de Charrière revealed the anxiety for his father and pity for himself which mingled in his emotions. ". . . He must have suffered horribly to take such an incredible step. God knows where he is and what he has resolved to do! On the other hand, all is wrack and ruin in France. The Bontems, with whom 50,000 francs has been placed, will surely be ruined. My annuity will be cut off. . . . And this harpy[1] who has charge of everything! . . . I shall be able to offer thee, Minna, only poverty and dependence . . . and this thought which made me so proud, 'I have saved Minna from slavery,' will be changed into the continual reflection that I myself am thrust into it, and that I have taken from her all means of escaping from it. . . . Where is my father, in God's name? Where can he be? What an impulse! What despair! I am ruined . . ." etc. Although this outburst sounds very like " my daughter and my ducats," it was his loyalty to his father that finally got the upper hand, and when, a week after his father's disappearance, he reached The Hague, whither he had journeyed from Brunswick in three days and nights, without food or sleep, his uncle was impressed by the filial concern he displayed, and wrote Rosalie to that effect:

" His sentiments are admirable so far as the levity of his age and character permit. He could see by the papers we have found that his father has left enormous debts, 100,000 to 120,000 *livres* (Swiss). He wants to examine everything, to pay everything. He hates Switzerland and wants to leave it for ever, and not retain a single thing there. He thinks that he can fix and settle himself for life in Brunswick, and just now there is talk of a marriage. . . . I do not know what steps will be taken for Benjamin, who is a minor. As long as my brother's death is not established, there cannot, I suppose, be a settlement. It is possible, I suppose, that

[1] Marianne. At this time Benjamin is very bitter against her. " Dulcinea " is another epithet he applies to her, and at another time he rails against " the pedagogical love of a sour old maid."

1788 nothing can be sold, and then I do not know what can be done with the creditors." (Amsterdam, September 23, 1788.)

"He has shown himself ready to sacrifice everything in order to save his father's honour, to find him again, to make life pleasant and endurable for him. All that he said on the subject was commendable, but his manner he gets from Louise Montrond, and we cannot hide from ourselves that there are resemblances whose outcome one is afraid of. He detests the Bernese, the county of Vaud, the estates; he will never set foot there again except to sell everything." (October 14, 1788.)

At length the Stadtholder received a raving and incoherent letter from the missing Juste, written on what he himself believed to be his death-bed, and dated from Bruges, where, after days of aimless wandering, he had fallen ill with a fever. The letter, which was not of a tenor calculated to redeem his reputation, was meant to be delivered only after his demise, but the messenger presented it at once. While Samuel was scouring Holland and Belgium for clues of him, and Benjamin, "with death in the heart," had returned to Brunswick to solicit the aid of the Duke, Juste suddenly appeared at Beau Soleil! "Never has any one acted more contrary to his own interests, moral and material," wrote Samuel, who was now obliged to remain in Holland, trying to obtain concessions from the Prince of Orange and to disentangle his brother's affairs. "And when you add to this the total ruin and lot of his son—my God, death would have been a mercy!"

"If only the Duke will do something, my father will be saved," had been Benjamin's refrain at the beginning of the difficulties. But while, as long as it was merely a question of the injustice and jealousy of the Bernese, the broad-minded Duke had shown himself disposed to side with Colonel Constant against his persecutors, now that a deliberate act of insubordination had stained his honour as a soldier, Duke Ferdinand lost all interest in the case.

The winter which followed was an unhappy one for Benjamin, and even the sympathy and caresses of his Minna were unavailing to rally him from his nervousness and discouragement. All his literary ambitions were as dead as his matrimonial ones. His health suffered from his mental unrest. His whole mind and time were devoted to writing petitions and memorials, to settling the claims of creditors, and the disposition of his father's estates. He resolved to atone for the trouble his indiscretions had caused his father in the past, by his zeal in serving him now.

All this agitation had an important influence on Benjamin's 1788
future, not only in confirming his bitter and cynical attitude, so early adopted, and in unsettling his relations with the Court of Brunswick, just on the point of becoming a permanent career, but in deepening his hatred of aristocracies and thus directing his sympathies toward the political principles he was later to champion. It had another obvious and more immediate effect, resulting from the irritable and sensitive state of his nerves, which his anxieties had sadly disarranged. The concluding sentences of a letter to his uncle indicate the nature of this disturbance:

"I do not speak to you of my attachment to you and to all the people at La Chablière. I consider that as taken for granted and no longer to be mentioned. Tell Rosalie that it is not my fault if Mme. de Charrière has made her the vehicle of our tempestuous correspondence. That woman is crazy. . . ."

How "tempestuous" that correspondence had become during the interval that had elapsed since the last letter to her which has been quoted in this chapter, the following extract from a long letter written at the close of the year that had begun so rapturously for their friendship, will show:

"I do not know whether you are justified in accusing me of lack of frankness, at least I do know that I have not been so open with any one as with you. You will say, that proves that frankness is not in my nature, or that my experience has accustomed me to distrust and unfaithfulness. I still think you are mistaken. I am very suspicious, it is true, but at the same time very outspoken. I generally say what I think about things and people. For some time I have been reticent, but it is, I always feel, impossible for me to be deceitful. I think that what you have taken for secrecy in me was pride, for pride, if I am not mistaken, makes up a great part of my character, and the assumption of understanding, as that of advising me, antagonizes me in spite of myself. You recall that when Mme. Chambrier invited M. de Charrière, and told him to invite me, for a party of *Quinze*, you wrote me from your bed a charming little note, to tell me that you expected to be preferred to this party, having my promise. Well, I loved you very much; I would have sacrificed much more for you, but the idea that you *expected* this sacrifice almost made me want to disappoint you. I detest an avowal which is demanded, which people think they have a right to. Even with Minna, I have caught myself keeping a ridiculous silence on the most trivial matters, because I could not see myself stoop to explain something to her. I did not confess it to her, and she certainly did not notice

1788 it, but I quickly made amends. But this feeling and intention did exist. . . ." (December 13, 1788.)[1]

This acute self-analysis furnishes the key to much of Benjamin's perversity. It explains his repeated refusal to grant to his relatives the assurance of affection they endeavoured to extract from him ; it accounts for his failure to meet his father openly and affectionately, and for the dissensions, reproaches and revolts that marked the closing years of his intimacy with Mme. de Staël. It should have served to warn Mme. de Charrière, but with that fatal mania for managing which is the curse of many a clever woman, she could not get off the dangerous shoals on which she was running. The next day he continues :

" A very severe cold which, to use the Brunswickian dialect, I have *enjoyed* since yesterday and which I *gained* night before last, causes me to wake this morning with such a headache that I shall be obliged to shorten my letter more than I intended. . . . But there are still five hundred things that I want to say to you, and as I shall not write to you again this year, I would like to say them all now. When once my Memorial is finished our correspondence will resume its former abundancy and fecundity. Till then I cannot devote myself to you as I would like to.

" You ask me what you are to talk about in your letters. Of everything, except my father and his present difficulty. That is the sole forbidden theme. You cannot say anything important to me about it, and everything which you would say would be disagreeable to me. It is not at Colombier that an affair that is to be decided at The Hague can be judged, and your opinion can be of no consequence. So never mention it, I earnestly beg of you ; for my part, I will not weary you with it. For the rest, I will always read with pleasure anything you write me about yourself, about myself, about the things that occupy or interest you ; your *esprit*, —the friendship which I feel for you—make all these details dear to me.

" I do not know whether I am speaking a language which is intelligible to you. I am afraid you do not believe in divided friendships, nor in gratitude. You are mistaken. At least I feel differently about it. I am perfectly able to love my father, be occupied with him, and forget, while I am working in his defence, all the other interests which touch me ; love my Minna, and when I am near her think only of her many amiable and admirable qualities ; and of the peaceful happiness that awaits me ; love you, and when I write to you, renew sincerely and tenderly the moments

[1] Part of a long letter covering three successive days, the beginning and ending of which are missing. Rudler calls attention to the fact that the first page of some of Benjamin's letters to her is frequently missing.

we passed together, admire your wit, love your sensibility, forgive 1789
your inequalities and your inconsistencies, and remember that although you are not made up so as to either enjoy or bestow uninterrupted happiness, you are made to inspire the keenest emotion, to relish and get the most delicious pleasure. I will go further ; I can love my uncle, in spite of his collective friendships, his ' we love each others,' his peevishness, etc., and pardon the defender of my father, often with feeble and clumsy hands, but with the best intentions, for *Laure*,[1] the moral catechist, his second wife, etc.

" You have given me great pleasure, and I believe you have done right, by not making our differences public. Do not give this little satisfaction to those who have ridiculed and envied our intimacy. These differences exist no more, I hope, at least they will stick to me only till their memory is effaced. Their causes will not reappear."

On the whole, in spite of some characteristic masculine irritability, Benjamin appears manly, frank and sincere in this letter, as he does through all the difficulties into which her jealous tyranny was driving their friendship. Plainly, the experiences of the past few months had developed and matured him greatly. Some cruel, cutting things had to be said once for all, if he was to continue the friendship in peace and with dignity. But to her disregard of danger-signals, she added an evident, and perhaps natural, jealousy which unfortunately took the form of some sort of tabby-cat clawings and provoking little digs and querulous complainings. As one whom the gods would destroy, we see her calling up innumerable little grievances, old and new, small debts to her husband, differences over definitions, everything that could contribute to the already ruffled state of his temper and nerves. The last straw was when she rushed straight into that forbidden " vulgar publicity " which he deprecated for their quarrels, and gave Rosalie the cue to the whole situation. The storm, which had been muttering and threatening throughout the correspondence of the spring and summer of 1789, broke on the 14th of September, when one of her letters reached him at a particularly agitated and busy moment in the difficulties with the Bernese authorities. He burst out brutally, in retaliation :

" Your mysterious manner of writing bores and fatigues me. I do not like sibyls. You must speak out plainly or keep still, especially as I have scarcely time to answer you, and still less time or desire to study out your meaning. . . . The conduct of my father

[1] Title of an unsuccessful novel by Samuel de Constant. His *Moral Catechism* also seems to have been dull reading.

1789 in all his charges was legal except when open threat drove him away. In many points it was infinitely meritorious. If you would tell me what they told you I could enlighten you. But with your affectation of conciseness, which you think so majestic, I can tell you nothing.

" This being so, I pray God to have you in His holy care, and I beg you to burn my letters at once, as I burned yours before I left Switzerland. I think I have a right to demand it. It is for you to decide if you will preserve a cause of anxiety for me, and punish me for my great confidence. B. C."

Mme. de Charrière did not long deliberate as to how she could best calm the tempest she had stirred up. Her impetuous reply was written on the back of his terrible letter, and magnificently signed :

" Be so good as to tell me if you are very ungrateful and very ill-natured, or only a little crazy ? Your severity diminishes my nicety a little. Write and attest to me in full that all my letters are burned, I will also burn yours.

" I. A. E. van Tuyll van Serooskerken de Charrière."

Then, of course, she added a postscript which was very gentle and feminine, but which spoiled the effect of her stinging brevity :

" Not expecting this frenzy I wrote you very gently a few days ago, and have gone about praising and commending you to every one. If you have returned to your senses before receiving this, have no fear for the effect of that rude and uncivil attack. I shall have forgotten it before you have. . . ."

The letter written, she began to vacillate and reconsider. She dispatched it, then was seized with panic, and contrived to get it back from the post. Then her evil genius prompted her to send it to Rosalie, at Lausanne, with this poor little pretext :

" May you not, mademoiselle, by some pleasantries, and without intending it, have angered your cousin against me ? . . . I think that this mood will not last long, and if you can shorten it or completely destroy it, you will do me a great favour."

" That woman is crazy," was Benjamin's contemptuous response to whatever attempt Rosalie may have made to fulfil this mission of peacemaker. Henceforth, the intimacy with his uncle's family, which had lapsed during his excessive devotion to the lady of Colombier, appears to have revived. But the correspondence with Barbet, which had been thus painfully interrupted, was not resumed for three months, and in those months of silence Mme. de Charrière might have seen her mistakes and resolved to avoid them in the future. But she had passed the period of youth, and reformation was difficult. This wonderful friendship was destined to

have another and equally interesting phase, but the spontaneity 1790
and perfect confidence of their earlier intercourse was never fully recovered.

On New Year's Day (1790) Benjamin broke the long silence by a letter of greeting. She acknowledged it with " transports of delight," and the correspondence was gradually resumed. In May he cleared the air of any lingering embarrassment by placing their friendship on the new basis it was henceforth to occupy :

". . . Your last letter gave me great pleasure, a pleasure mingled with bitterness, of course ; a pleasure which makes me exclaim at every word, ' It is indeed a pity ! ' Truly it is a pity that Fate has separated us so completely and for ever. There is between us a point of contact that should have triumphed over all differences of tastes, of whim, of infatuation, that could have hindered our perfect understanding. We would often have parted in anger, but we would always have come together again. It is a great pity that you should have been unhappy at Colombier, and I unhappy here ; you ill, I ruined ; you troubled by indifference, I indignant at weakness ; and so far from each other that we cannot join our complaints, nor our discontents, nor our commiserations. I am happy in my wife, I cannot even wish to come nearer to you at the cost of being farther from her, but I shall never cease to say, ' It is a pity ! ' The thought of you always brings back to me a part of the animation which my sorrows, my physical weakness and my long association with people I despise, have taken away from me. They cannot mention you to me without my feeling a warmth which amazes those who often speak of you carelessly or for lack of something to say. At those suppers where I do not utter a word, if some one mentions you I am at once changed. They say that the Pretender, stupefied by his misfortune and by wine, was only roused from his lethargy by the mention of his family troubles. . . . Adieu. Certainly no one can appreciate you, love you, wish you more happiness, than I. If by a chance I do not foresee, I ever return to Switzerland, I will ask your hospitality. Until then I ask you not to yield to fits of temper which will deprive us of the little pleasure that our separation allows us, and of our correspondence."

Although opinions may differ as to who had the " fit of temper " that had disturbed their correspondence, it is plain that there is a great deal of the past tense in this letter, and that the reign of *Barbet* is at an end. Henceforth it is rather as Mme. de Charrière that she takes her place in his life. For her own part, with a woman's readiness to overlook what she prefers not to see, she is ready to lift their friendship back to its pedestal and forget where the crack was.

CHAPTER VII

MATRIMONY AND MELANCHOLY

(1789–1793)

1789 WHEN the letter quoted at the end of the last chapter was written, Benjamin had been married nearly a year, and had presented his wife to his relatives in Switzerland the previous summer. The road to matrimony had been made smoother than at first appeared possible, by Juste's discovery that if anything was to be saved from his rapacious creditors, it could only be done by at once settling upon Benjamin his mother's dowry. This arrangement, by rendering him less dependent on an advance of salary, enabled Benjamin to press the Duke for his promised promotion. On the 27th of January the de Sévery's Brunswick acquaintance wrote them of his expected advancement to the post of "Counsellor of Legation, with the prospect, they say, of being some day in charge of the French part of the Duke's correspondence," and a possible salary of one hundred (new) louis a year.

The wedding was set for February or March, but various hindrances occurred, and it did not take place until the 8th of May. June, however, found the newly wed pair at Lausanne for the summer. Owing to some injudicious expressions of dread of the new wife on the part of Mme. de Charrière, Benjamin did not take Minna to Colombier, although this was before the quarrel.

In August he accompanied his father to Holland, and in October Minna joined them at The Hague, where, according to Rosalie, she was well received and frequently invited to the Court. Throughout the autumn and winter Benjamin continued to be engaged in the preparation of his father's Memorial for the Standrecht. The excitement through which he had passed, and which had reacted so painfully upon his intimacy with Mme. de Charrière, had left traces on his nervous system that even his "gentle and tender Minna" could not remove. Whatever her failures and frailties as a spouse, Minna undoubtedly had to suffer much from

his whims and depression, during these months of supposable honeymoon, which may have furnished an excuse for her subsequent lapses from the straight path of virtue. "Six months ago," Benjamin wrote, after being but ten weeks a bridegroom, "I said, 'I shall improve in three months'; three months have passed and I am unchanged, except more hopeless." A kind of apathy, a deep dejection, succeeded to the tension and the unwonted energy that followed his father's disgrace. The very act of putting his hand to his head or of turning the page of a book, was difficult for him. His pessimism, so long a mere artistic pose, was becoming an *idée fixe*. 1789

"M. de Constant is still at Brunswick," wrote Mme. de Charrière to Suard, "wiser, but no less bored than when you saw him. He has a great deal of *esprit*, for in all his letters he depicts his ennui in a manner ever new and ever interesting. This arid subject becomes fertile in his hands." His correspondence with Mme. de Charrière at this time contains passages whose melancholy is like that of the journal of Henri Frédéric Amiel. The same timidity and paralysis of will underlie the pessimism of both men, but to whatever abnormal conditions it is traceable, Benjamin's present pessimism is evidently of quite a different and more serious nature than the graceful and picturesque ennui whose symptoms once afforded him such æsthetic enjoyment. When we see on what an insecure foundation of non-resistance and nihilism that active and combative middle-age of his was built, we wonder whence he derived sufficient perseverance and faith in man and progress, to fight as he did for a political creed based on perfectibility. That he could have worked his way up to the confession of hope that he made when the final volume of his *History of Religions* appeared is still more astonishing.

To any intelligent mind, surveying from a distance the European situation at this moment, there was ample cause for pessimism and despair. Benjamin's isolation from the scene of the drama in which the problems that troubled him were being tried out, and upon which the attention of the world was just then concentrated, no doubt had intensified his natural infirmities of will and of temperament. Those who are in the thick of the fight have no time to see its horrors. In the mere spectator, the terrible events and fierce passions which were convulsing France might easily breed the cynical and bitter sort of philosophizing, as superficial as it was futile, in which he was taking refuge. His love of freedom and hatred of autocracy were the strongest and most sincere emotions he possessed, and he must inevitably have been

1790 deeply stirred by the events at which he seems to sneer, but seeing no chance of taking part in them, he professed utter hopelessness of any good ever resulting from all this upheaval of society. His real sentiments appear in the following extract from a business letter to M. de Sévery:

"We have unfortunately very little communication with France, and but few of the papers reach us which elsewhere are bringing so much light and emulation. I hope this emulation may be fruitful. I except from my wish my new country, governed by a great man as equably as if this great man were only just—but with this reservation I make no exception. I am disgusted by the excesses to which the people go after having shaken off the yoke, but I should be still more so if the yoke had not been shaken off. I do not know whether Universal Equality may not be a chimera, but I do know that aristocratic inequality is the most frightful of realities. When the land which groans under this horrible government is beautiful, as France was, when the climate is mild, the sky cloudless, the geographical situation superb, the inhabitants enlightened and agreeable, the contrast between tyranny and nature is the more revolting." (August 13, 1790.)

To public causes for despondency were added private ones. A final decision of Juste's case at Berne, in July 1790, which deprived him of all offices and emoluments, and imposed heavy fines upon him, had driven him to renounce for ever the country where he had been so unjustly treated.[1] The following summer, having resolved to begin life anew as a Frenchman and to reclaim his rights to French citizenship in a free land, under the new law granting citizenship to descendants of religious refugees, he disposed of all his remaining property in Vaud,[2] and bought a farm at Brévans, near Dôle, to which he removed all his effects, including Marianne. Certain business formalities, connected with this exodus, demanded Benjamin's presence in Lausanne that summer. His frequent absences from Brunswick gave the frail and fickle Minna an opportunity to console herself with other lovers, and each time that he returned to Brunswick some new escapade of hers was discovered. "Having a great deal of imagination and *esprit*," says Anatole France, in his characteristic account of the situation,

[1] In 1799 he was reinstated and given a pension.

[2] In 1791, according to Rosalie, he made over La Chablière and his property on the rue de Bourg to Benjamin as his mother's portion; and, by order of the Standrecht, Le Désert and Vallombreuse were sold at half their value. Beau Soleil was "sold" to Marianne, and afterwards Rosalie's sister Lisette bought part of it.

" she was particularly inconvenient. For fear of being vulgar 1792
she did not love her husband, but a young rake, with a love she called pure, and boasted of."

Benjamin was too proud and sensitive to reveal at first the state of affairs he found on his return to Brunswick. He only hints in a veiled way at the misery of his married life.

" I once was thought agreeable, because I was loved with passion. The passion has passed, and the blame is laid on me. There is no attempt to make me agreeable, but I am censured for no longer appearing to be so, and silence and coldness and the discontinuance of all intimacy is the result. . . . I love my wife for a thousand good qualities that she has, but the great languor into which I have sunk has estranged her. If I have a moment of confidence or of warmth, she is either cold or indifferent, and to avoid an explanation which would be beyond my strength, I am silent and go away. . . . All that you can say on the subject is useless. I am powerless over myself, and your sermons are a potion offered to a sick man whose jaws are closed by tetanus. Besides, I am not a believer, nor an unbeliever, moral nor immoral. I see no probability that there is a God, although I assure you that I would be very glad if there were one. That would change my whole existence and would give me a desire and an object." (To Mme. de Charrière, July 6 (?), 1792.)

The Duke had eased his financial troubles by several advancements in his duties, but the coldness and humiliation he endured in his home was becoming intolerable. He had wild thoughts of changing his name and disappearing, leaving the past behind for ever ; but as usual he lacked the initiative to break away, and he remained where he was, and continued to " see the sun rise and set, to open and close books which neither amuse nor touch me, surrounded by beings who do not love me, or no longer love me, indifferent to all, misunderstood, perhaps, by some."

The literature of *Weltschmerz* receives a valuable contribution in his letters of the next four years—years tormented by the interminable and dreary military lawsuits of his father, by his uncongenial surroundings, by the infelicities of his domestic life, and by the consciousness of wasted talents and lost opportunities. " This affair is killing me," he wrote :

". . . My best years are passing ; as I grow older I shall become still more incapable of concentration, and burdened with a wife who has renounced a more agreeable position for me, I would not know which way to turn should I lose my place here. . . . As for my living, it seems as assured as it can be in this stupid con-

1790 trivance they call the world. I understand neither the purpose nor the architect nor the painter nor the forms of this magic-lantern of which I have the honour to be a part. Shall I understand it better when I have disappeared from the narrow and obscure sphere in which it pleases I know not what invisible power to make me dance, whether I will or not? That is what I do not know, but I fear it may be with this secret as it is with those of the Freemasons, which have no value except in the eyes of the uninitiated.

"I have just been reading *Les Mémoires de Noailles*, by Millot. . . . I read there how 24,000,000 beings had worked hard to place over several millions of their species, a being like themselves. I saw that none of these 24,000,000 beings, nor the being who had been placed at the head of the other millions, nor these other millions either, found themselves any better off for having succeeded in their enterprise. Louis XIV. died detested, humiliated, ruined; Philip V., melancholy and almost crazy. Their inferiors had no better end, and then see the succession of struggles and of bloodshed, and of numberless battles, of effort of all kinds; and man will not comprehend once for all that it is not worth while to agitate yourself to-day when you are to die to-morrow. Thomson, the author of the *Seasons*, often spent entire days in his bed, and when they asked him why he did not rise, answered, 'I see no reason for rising, man.' Nor I, either. I see no reason for anything. Yet, if this horrible and crushing affair did not weigh unceasingly upon me, I would not complain. The regularity of my life would take the place of enjoyment; I like to do the same thing to-day that I did yesterday: to revisit the places I have seen, to experience a series of small emotions, which are all unimportant, but whose succession interests me in a negative way. As when I have begun a tune, however dull it is, I do not like to have it left unfinished.

"There is, of course, a voice which says, 'Tis a great pity.' But when I analyse the meaning of this voice, I find that it is a fool which knows not what it says. Even were I constituted in a manner to study and discern the truth, even if nature had not given me powers and talents which the common run of men have not—since circumstances, the future, my passions, my father, my health, are unfavourable to the exercise of these faculties, they reduce themselves to zero. One minus one equals nothing; one hundred minus one hundred equals nothing.

"This nothing, poor plaything of all sorts of events, will never forget what a happy nothing he was when he was convalescing near Isabelle. This nothing will love you always and embraces you tenderly and begs you to write to him. He saw your sister yesterday and talked with her about you. She seems to be interested and the surface of the ice is melting. But the Princess came up and this mixture of salt and saltpetre produced a condensation four times stronger. Adieu." (To Mme. de Charrière, December 24, 1790.)

Whenever Benjamin was miserable, he was sure that the thing he most required was solitude. "I felt it at eighteen, at twenty, at twenty-four, I feel it at twenty-five—I ought, for my own happiness, and that of others, to live alone. Literature and solitude, that is my element!" The invocations of Solitude were generally succeeded by a fresh impulsion in the opposite direction, for, as a matter of fact, Mme. de Staël herself was no more miserable in the seclusion of Coppet than was Benjamin when deprived of the society and the agitation he believed that he detested. So now, after proclaiming the appropriateness of solitude to the peculiarities of his disposition, he at once plunged into a series of new love affairs—as a balm, perhaps, for his wounded vanity—which were of no credit either to his manhood or to his delicacy. During the spring, his flirtation with the wife of Baron Marenholz was the talk of the Court. The *liaison* was broken off after the lady's father had discovered their correspondence, but not before it had afforded her husband an excuse for ridding himself of her. Charlotte Marenholz was destined to enter Benjamin's life at another perturbed period, but though he made light of the affair at this time, with his customary habit of concealing wounds with a jest, his pride, if nothing more, suffered severely throughout these last months in Brunswick. 1791

"I have reached that point of disillusion, which I could not but desire, if I had my choice, and where I am convinced that I shall never be in any happier situation than I am now. This conviction, and the abiding and profound sense of the shortness of life, makes my book or my pen drop from my hand even while I am studying; the pleasures of the world, society, amusements—insipid, hectic, cloying, or monotonous—that people substitute for other pleasures—I will not say more solid, but less strenuous—are hateful to me because they speak neither to the heart nor to the mind. The pleasures of the mind, the only ones that I enjoy, no longer have enough charm for me to hold my attention, so that I pass my life in a painful and uneasy indolence, with the feeling that I could better employ my time, a secret vague regret at seeing it slip away and doing nothing, and the conviction that everything I might do would amount to nothing, and at the end of fifty years all will be exactly the same.

"There is, says Rétif, in the heart of man, a kind of hope, which spreads its tints over all objects, but which rarely outlasts the twenty-fifth year of our life. I shall soon be twenty-four and for a long time my hope has been twenty-four. . . . I have had, like everybody, my time of illusion. It has passed. Perhaps a little more *esprit* than others have makes me more insensible than

1791 they to the solaces which society—that purposeless gathering together of beings without common interests—appears to offer. Perhaps I have the misfortune to feel too much what so many writers have repeated, while acting as if they did not believe a word of it, that all our pursuits, all our efforts, all we attempt, do or change, are only games for a few moments, and can lead only to a very quick annihilation ; that consequently we have no more motive for acquiring glory than for taking a walk or making up a hand at whist ; that time, regardless of us, proceeds at an unvarying pace, and carries us along just the same, whether we sleep or wake, act or remain totally inactive.

" This truth, so trite, and always overlooked, is always present in my mind, and renders me indifferent to almost everything." (To Mme. de Charrière, (?) May 21, 1791.)

Meanwhile his wife and her friends were subjecting him to an undisguised system of persecution, counting, he perceived, on the supposed feebleness of his character ! To the degree, he writes Mme. de Charrière, that even her lover blushes at her insolence, and tries to treat him more civilly. " Ah, it is not *esprit* which serves as a weapon ! " he exclaims. " It is character and firmness. I had more *esprit* than she, but she trod me under her feet."

In addition to her infidelities, Minna possessed certain bizarre tastes which, while harmless and benevolent, must nevertheless have had their inconvenient side. " Brought up in the country until she was fourteen," Benjamin wrote of her some years later, " at Court from fourteen till twenty-two, she has neither the ability nor the desire to occupy herself. A multitude of cats, dogs, birds, friends and lovers, that is her society." In time these eccentricities became a mania, and when, in 1813, Benjamin visited Brunswick with his second wife, he learned that Minna was devoting the pension which the Duchess had given her to a sort of " Animal Rescue " work.

" She has one hundred and twenty birds, two squirrels, thirty-six cats, eight dogs and some other unclassified animals, such as magpies, crows, fish, etc. All this in a large room next to hers, and it takes three women to care for this menagerie with tolerable neatness. Moreover, all the small boys in the town entertain themselves by throwing all the stray cats and dogs into her garden, and she takes care of them all until she can find a home for them." (September 23, 1813.)

The pretext assigned in the documents for the separation—that she had refused to live in Switzerland with her husband—is probably false. The charges against Minna must have been very

grave, since he was able to obtain from her an abrogation of all 1793
claims upon his property or for her support. In addition, notwithstanding the protection of her patroness, the Duchess, he succeeded in extracting from her a declaration acknowledging that she had " wronged her husband, failed grievously in her duty by drawing upon herself public suspicion," and avowing that " M. de Constant has conducted himself in all points . . . and . . . in the whole course of the differences that existed between us in a manner worthy of approval, and everything which has or could be said to the contrary is false." On the day when the papers of separation from Minna were signed, which followed closely on his parting with Charlotte Marenholz, he wrote :

" They are broken, all my bonds—all, all. Those which were my torment as well as those which were my consolation, all, all. What strange weakness ! For more than a year I have been desiring this moment, I was sighing for complete independence. It has come and I am as one stricken, in the solitude that surrounds me. I am fearful of losing my hold on everything—I who have so much bemoaned my attachment to anything." (Mar. 31, 1793.) [1]

In the loneliness of his present situation, Benjamin saw one ray of hope, and that ray shone from Colombier. True to his vow that when shipwrecked he would seek that peaceful port, he wrote Mme. de Charrière, " I do not tell you that I love you, but my plan proves it sufficiently. I must always come back to you." His plan was, after remaining at the Court just long enough to prove that he was not driven away, and to allow the " old maids of Lausanne " to digest his divorce, to request the Duke to relieve him from his duties at Court for an indefinite period. He asked his friend to rent an apartment for him in the old château of Colombier—bedroom, study, library and two servants' rooms—for six months, with the privilege of renewal, and he proposed to move into it all his possessions, including his books, which he was bringing from Brunswick. To Mme. de Nassau he sent most of his household linen, begging her to use it lest it be spoiled, and the intention was clearly no longer to regard Brunswick as his place of residence. " If with my books, and near you, I could find repose, this repose which has eluded me," he wrote Mme. de Charrière, ". . . if my soul becomes calm and my heart cured, I shall stay there all my life." His heart warmed at the thought of the welcome that awaited him. He saw again in imagination

[1] Minna died February 27, 1823.

1793 the " white table and that other black table which swallowed up everything ; the nights, the lime-blossom tea." The years of torture with Minna had changed him ; his friend would find him sadder, but less bitter than formerly.

Sainte-Beuve, whose acquaintance with his letters was incomplete, and whose errors in regard to Benjamin have been repeated by so many writers, represents him as returning to Switzerland, thoroughly disillusioned, and Mme. de Charrière's star as " now in complete eclipse and without light." On the contrary, it must have been her moment of greatest triumph. She had survived several love affairs, and a grievous quarrel, and the dream of her heart was about to be fulfilled—that Benjamin should settle in her vicinity and that their intercourse should be uninterrupted. " Never," she replied, " have you loaded me with such sweet and pleasant things. . . . You are truly becoming a sociable being, and affectionate as well as lovable." And, " I always was," he answered, " but nourished in vanity by my early education, then put to torture by people who wanted to extract feeling from me as they squeeze the juice from a lemon, then cast into a sewer of stupidity and apathy, with a demon of indifference and of giddiness, and obstinacy and silliness and unkindness—how the devil could I be sociable and affectionate ? "

In his impatience to be out of his present *milieu*, Switzerland became transfigured with an unaccustomed glory, and even the detested Bernese government seemed less tyrannical than formerly. Although still, theoretically, a thorough Democrat, the experiences of the Revolution in France, the practical working out of Democracy, had been so disastrous that he was forced to admit that, even should an opportunity present itself for joining a rebellion against Their Excellencies, he would not do it now.

" After all [the dissatisfied Democrats] are not so much to be pitied, especially if their extreme snobbishness in other respects be considered. I know more than one of them who would shudder at not being eligible to office, who would shudder just as much at seeing a clerk or a tradesman admitted to his table. With such inconsistencies, one is not well fitted for liberty. You find fault, that is all. Possibly this change in my way of thinking comes from my impatience to be in that country. It would be strange (and yet I almost believe it) if I, who have always rather prided myself on detesting my native land, were seized with home-sickness. What is certain is that in all my plans, the mountains of Switzerland and the Lake of Geneva count for much, and that I long to get near them. I have had enough of the Courts and the plains

and the sands of Brunswick. Yet before settling on the Lake of Geneva I shall certainly pass some time on that of Neuchâtel." (To Mme. de Charrière, September 25, 1793.) 1793

This unexpected enthusiasm for Switzerland, however, did not long survive the ennui of Lausanne society. With the exception of Mme. de Nassau, with whom he passed much time and became very confidential, he (as usual when writing to Colombier) classed his relatives among the people who were "loved from a sense of duty," but who bored him "by inclination," and he even owned to having sometimes more than enough of the society of this good aunt, "for all her *esprit*"; while her companion, Mlle. Rieu, with "her hemming and significant nods when she has uttered some monstrous foolishness," made him "want to slap her." "Lausanne always plunges me into profound melancholy and makes me see everything black," he confessed. A sense of the silent disapprobation of these good people, which always kept him ill at ease in their company, may have been increased by a consciousness of unfavourable comparison with his cousin Charles, who had succeeded in building up a successful business in the Chinese trade, to the great satisfaction of the Constants. Irritable, depressed, impatient of any kind of criticism or advice, Benjamin absented himself as much as possible from the tea-parties and card-parties which were the chief amusements of Lausanne, and passed his time while there in purchasing and devouring books, and in writing long letters to Mme. de Charrière.

The close of 1793 saw him at last installed in the château of Colombier. It was a vast and venerable structure, and afforded ample accommodations for numerous tenants. Benjamin only camped out there; at meals he was the guest of Mme. de Charrière, and most of his time was passed at her house. He had only to cross the street, pass an orchard and a picturesque old Romanesque church (which has since disappeared), and descend a long flight of steps, to be at her door. Godet pictures him, "with his long legs, leaping down the steps, to join his Egeria." Once more in her society, his heart (to borrow a metaphor from her young friend Pierre de Roussillon), "hardened by his life at Court, recovered the velvet of youth." The intimacy of the intercourse was heightened rather than incommoded by the invalid regime she was undergoing, as the following account of his arrival, which she sent to an intimate friend, indicates:

"At half-past five we had tea, Constant and I, in my room, and although cluttered as you can imagine—tables, chairs, bath-

1793 tub, all piled upon each other—nevertheless it had a festive air. I wish you could have slipped in beside me. At half-past six I got into the water, and stayed there until eight, Constant keeping me company faithfully and only leaving me for supper. We had a royal good time." (December 3, 1793.)

A vainer woman might, at fifty-three, have feared the effect of her appearance in invalid *déshabillé* upon a young man who had become habituated to a more fastidious femininity, and she really did suffer a pang when he called her wrapper "ragged." But after all, the intellectual *rapport* between them could afford to disregard merely physical considerations.

Colombier had changed greatly since the quiet months Benjamin had spent there five years before. Ripples from the flood of new life that had swept over Switzerland with the coming of the refugees had touched even the banks of Lake Neuchâtel, and brought animation into the tame, sedate circle over which Mme. de Charrière reigned. Two fresh interests, music and the *émigrés*, were dispelling her "vapours."

The panic of emigration, in those early days of the Revolution, had filled the highways of Europe with the fleeing nobles of France, and they poured into Switzerland on horseback, in grand carriages, on foot—weary and dirty, carrying their possessions on their backs in bundles—but, however, they came, all of them gay and optimistic, dreaming of a speedy return to the old regime. "The whole country is filled with French," wrote Rosalie (1789). "Great nobles, deputies; you see nothing in the streets but abbés, crosses of St. Louis, beautiful women; all this changes society."

"You would think yourself back in the old days of chivalry," wrote Benjamin to Rosalie, in December (1791), when he was returning from Lausanne to Brunswick,

"to see these Paladins, armed to the teeth, with their white-plumed helmets, their enormous sabres, and their great cloaks, approach you, and examine you, question you, tell you their names in order to learn yours, always talking of their valour, and ready to prove it; for the rest, as advanced in politics—as well as in everything else which they offer in favour of their cause—as the Rolands and Rinaldos might have been. The emigration is increasing. In my journey from Bâle here [Frankfort], I met eight hundred French who were coming from all the frontier villages. . . . I have seen no Death's heads, but many black mustachios, which the enemies of Liberty and Reason in all countries seem to take nowadays for an emblem."

MADAME DE CHARRIÈRE'S SALON AT COLOMBIER

By permission of M. Marcel Godet and of Fleischel & Co. of Berlin.

At first they were received with great hospitality, and 1793
when the inns were full the Swiss welcomed them in their own homes, admiring the fortitude with which they met their misfortunes. But their swelling numbers increased the cost of living and soon began to complicate the relations of Switzerland with both the French Government and the Prussian Coalition. Moreover, the freedom of their manners and morals, in the general laxity incidental to the promiscuous and unconventional associations into which adversity had thrown them, occasioned no little scandal among their more punctilious hosts. All this finally led to a stricter enforcement of the laws excluding "suspects" and *émigrés*; and those who were permitted to remain often lived under assumed names, in greatest seclusion, or supported themselves by the pursuit of humble trades which accorded ill with their noble lineage.

Most of the newcomers in Neuchâtel found their way sooner or later to the shrine of Mme. de Charrière, whose aristocratic sympathies were as well known as her romances, and her circle of chosen spirits was greatly expanded and enlivened. Her time, money and interest were wholly devoted in their behalf. The literary fruit of all this new excitement in her life was the *Lettres trouvées dans les Portefeuilles d'un Émigré*, and a comedy, called *L'Émigré*. The political views embodied in these productions were very distasteful to Benjamin, and although he praised them for their literary merits, and was friendly with her new protégés, he did not hide from her that he found the *émigrés* of Switzerland no less boastful and trivial than the aristocracy of the Court of Brunswick. He made some caustic comments upon people who could be so easily distracted from the memory of the afflictions through which they had passed, and could exhibit such marvellous self-control before the spectacle of their country's ruin.

But all the refugees in Neuchâtel were not of this type. Some of them were fleeing from persecutions by the enemies of the Revolution, and among these was a German family of Jacobin principles whose society Benjamin now frequented, to the great uneasiness of Mme. de Charrière. In July of the preceding summer, an attractive woman of thirty, named Thérèse Forster, accompanied by her two young children, was discovered to be living quietly in modest quarters on the edge of the lake near Colombier. She had fled there from Mayence, where her husband had displayed revolutionary sympathies, when that city had been occupied by the Coalition. Shortly after her arrival, she was joined by Ferdinand

1793 Huber, a Jacobin journalist, a scholarly man and a friend of Schiller, who passed as her protector in the absence of her husband. But his presence soon set the gossips' tongues wagging. Every forenoon her little daughter Thérèse went to take lessons of him at the village inn where he lodged. In the afternoon the whole family, accompanied by Huber and an old servant, went to walk in true German fashion along the shores of the lake. Their evenings were also passed together, Huber talking politics while the others scraped lint. This combination of an unconventional *ménage* with Jacobin politics was enough to exclude them from Neuchâtel society, notwithstanding their evident need of relief and sympathy, and it was to the credit of Mme. de Charrière that her kind heart overlooked both political and social heresies. She took them under her protection at once, and in many quiet and tactful ways she aided Thérèse Forster and her children, in spite of her rooted antipathy to the German race and literature.

Although Benjamin did not endorse the extremes of Jacobinism that Huber upheld, they had enough in common to enjoy talking together. Intellectually, Huber owed much to his criticism and suggestion; indeed, Benjamin once remarked after reading one of Huber's articles that he found so much of himself in it that he was tempted to say, like the bell-ringer after a good sermon, " It was I who rang ! " He invited " Hüberchen," as he called him, to visit him in Lausanne and on closer acquaintance discovered that he was " an infinitely agreeable and unusual creature."

At first Mme. de Charrière pardoned Huber's political principles for the sake of his keen, wide-awake mind, but she never liked Thérèse, whose type of mind was *trop alambiqué* to please her, and when it became a question of seeing her pet Benjamin lounge away hours in their company, she made no secret of her dislike of the " citizen and citizeness," as she called them.

In her sentimental Teutonic style, Thérèse has recorded her impressions of Benjamin and his friend, whose intimacy assumed a romantic and tender aspect in the glow of her own attachment to Huber:

" From 1793 she was my idol and long was the object of my passion. We forced ourselves into intimacy, we admired each other, we understood each other, and as often happens with certain electric currents, we repelled each other. . . . Ill-health had rendered her once elegant figure large and shapeless, her complexion was red and her eyes often were red too. Her hands, ankles and feet were well shaped, her neck, too, was beautiful. . . . She was

enchanting if she wanted to be, or rather if she liked you. . . . The 1793
timid mediocrity of the people about her, the opposition roused by her tastes, her habits and opinions, everywhere, even in her immediate circle, the deceptions her heart had repeatedly encountered, the approach of old age—all this had made her difficult to please. She was as fearless as possible in her judgment, but without going out of certain narrow limits, imposed by French conventions. . . . Animated, despotic, magnanimous, always noble, . . . irresistibly fascinating when she wanted to play the coquette." [1]

Of Benjamin she speaks as Mme. de Charrière's "last love" whom she had "saved at a critical moment in his life." "The gracious expression of their love," she says, made her own heart palpitate and disconcerted her inmost judgment, her very principles! He is interestingly depicted as

"Infinitely charming, a libertine without being corrupt—not a domestic man, unsystematic, without energy or activity. He is perfectly able to do without everything, knows how to sew on his buttons like a little clerk, and can make his own soup. Full of learning, consumed with interest in public affairs, and with all these contradictions, able to recognize, not without sadness, the value of simple domestic happiness. Like Abadonna at the gate of Paradise, he saw with silent pain the bliss of Huber and myself."

When the erratic and superfluous husband in Mayence obligingly died, Thérèse and Huber were married,[2] and after the edict expelling

[1] Letter to Mlle. Rheinhold, January 1806.

[2] Partly in an endeavour to reconcile Mme. Huber's father, Professor Heyne of Göttingen, to this marriage, Constant paid him a visit in April 1794, and sent Mme. de Charrière the following amusing picture of the German *intérieur*:

"With the liberty which is allowed in Germany . . . I was received in the room of her younger sister. . . . Picture a room carpeted with red, with blue curtains, a table with a writing-case, some paper bordered with flowers, exactly in the middle of it two new pens, and a well-sharpened pencil between the pens, a sofa with myriads of little sky-blue rosettes, some very white china cups with little roses on them, two or three little busts in a corner; in short, I found myself at Charlotte's, with this difference, that the lady was not what this collection promised, but seemed to me quite *spirituelle* and sensible. You have always to make an allowance for the daughter of a German professor. There are certain distinctive traits they never fail to have: disdain for the place where they live, complaints about the lack of society, the students they have to see, the narrow and monotonous sphere in which they live, stifled desires, more or less tinged with romanticism—this is the uniform of their *esprit*, and Mlle. Heyne, forewarned of my visit, took care to get into her uniform." (Godet, ii. p. 110.)

1793 the *émigrés* from Switzerland, they moved to Ulm. There Huber published a journal in which some of Benjamin's later political writings appeared. The friendship with these people survived that with Mme. de Charrière many years, for intellectually it formed a link with the new life upon which he was entering. After Huber's death in 1804, Benjamin assisted the son to start on a literary career in Paris, and there was even talk of his marrying one of Mme. Huber's daughters, who had been brought up as a sort of protégée of Mme. de Charrière.

The reconciliation with Mme. de Charrière was destined to be only temporary—many little discordances and retaliations in their daily intercourse at Colombier indicate a gradual loosening of the ties that had held them. These misunderstandings sprang from differences more serious than dissimilar taste in friends. For while age stiffened her conservative and aristocratic inclinations, Benjamin's experiences, and his sympathies with the spirit of the age then young, were confirming him in his radical and democratic theories. Their natural prejudices were intensified by the spectacle of the struggle between the French people and the *ancien régime*, and thus they were daily drifting further apart in their political and philosophical views. Mme. de Charrière was not a deep thinker; she lacked both capacity to judge and earnestness of conviction. Political opinions were as much a matter of whim with her, said one of her critics, as were her musical tastes. She wrote her books only for the moment, for her own amusement, or to unburden herself of ideas that occurred to her. The glowing faith which transfigures "lost causes and impossible loyalties" found no encouragement in her mockery and levity. And this was the mind under whose influence the sensitive young Benjamin Constant, so well prepared by inheritance and education for its teachings, had fallen in his most impressionable years! It was of this woman, who said of herself, "My black imagination poisons everything," that he wrote in *Adolphe*, "She was the first to develop my ideas." Under the spell of her wit, of which, he wrote his aunt, she had "enough to make Germany tremble," he had "faced life under all its aspects." In 1788 he wrote her, in a "dedication" to a work he never finished, "You have clarified my thought, you have lightened my difficulties, you have simplified my style"; and doubtless this was true. But the day came when he accused her of having tried to "kill the phantom of literary glory" in him. Her unconscious despotism might well have paralysed the ambition of a man less skittish than Benjamin

at the sight of bit and bridle. She stimulated his brain by her 1793
wit, only to feed it on the philosophy of disenchantment, the "nothingness of everything, and the greatest nothingness of the great nothing which follows the miserable everything."[1] Even then they were not content with the negation of all faith and desire, this clever elderly woman and her apt and precocious pupil —not satisfied with the contemplation of the ruin they had wrought, but must blow away with the light breath of paradox the only truth they had been able to discover—annihilation. And what did it all amount to in the end, this intercourse of theirs? asks Sainte-Beuve. "De l'esprit, encore de l'esprit, et toujours de l'esprit."

But she lived to reap the harvest of her own careless teaching, and to learn that the sort of negative attitude toward life which she offered could hold Benjamin only up to a certain point. As he grew wiser and more in earnest, he began to long for a solid foundation on which to build his thought and organize his activities, for definite relations to society, and the reaction from her influence was inevitable. For her graceful trifling, her *esprit*, her dispassionateness, her scepticism, belonged to an age and a fashion that was passing, while he, notwithstanding his constitutional inertia and pessimism, was at heart a son of the new era and had heard its call. He was standing face to face with a great epoch-making revolution in the ideals and institutions of a nation to which he was allied by blood. Already he was floating, in spite of her, out of the stagnant pools of her antiquated philosophy and her polished paradoxes, into the swift current of positive convictions and fresh ideals. He was catching the fever of hope that was in the air, and in the rush of new enthusiasm that was transforming him, he was to break with that old life, so precious, it may be, but also so outworn, and to be whirled into the heart of the political crisis. It was the contagious optimism and imperious force of Mme. de Staël which wrought the final emancipation.

[1] Sainte-Beuve.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW LIFE

(1794)

1794 THE year whose beginning saw Benjamin at last settled in his quarters at the château of Colombier was to be one of the most important and significant of his life. Before it ended he had severed for ever his connection with Minna and Brunswick, had made the acquaintance of Mme. de Staël, and had broken finally and irrevocably with Mme. de Charrière. When he stepped from the society that once frequented Suard's salon to that over which Mme. de Staël reigned, he turned his back on the fashions of thought and the ideals of the eighteenth century in which he was bred, and became one of the moderns, speaking the language and thinking in the terms of the nineteenth century.

The winter in Colombier to which he had so long looked forward had failed to bring the peace and healing on which he had counted. The " nights and lime-blossom tea " were forthcoming, but those long, quiet evenings when he sat beside Mme. de Charrière's couch in the moonlight which flooded the room, and discussed the recent happenings in France, failed, no less than those other " jolis moments " with Montaigne in his study, to still his restlessness or dispel his anxieties about the future. He wrote his aunt in February :

" I do not know whether it is the effect of this manner of living, or the blunting of my senses and soul, or the loss I have had, but I am plunged in black melancholy, and nothing can lift me out of it, except for a moment. . . . Perhaps my sadness comes from too much society, and surely if that of the woman I love, and who loves me tenderly, is too much, who can deny that I am made for a solitary life ? . . . I wish and I need to be able to get by myself, without any one being surprised or offended, or even noticing it, for with my strange weakness of character, which makes any manifestation of disapproval intolerable to me, when I see

that people are silent because they think me capricious, ungrateful, I can't endure it." 1794

Late in March indications that his presence in Brunswick would be acceptable to the Duke determined him to return there, the more readily since he had become convinced that the separation he had secured from Minna was not sufficient, and that he must have an absolute divorce which would be definitely binding. On the 3rd of April, therefore, he slipped quietly away from Colombier, leaving a note of farewell for Mme. de Charrière, whom he wished to spare, so he said, the pain of parting.

This return to the scene of his matrimonial misadventures was not a pleasant ordeal for him to meet. He was very sensitive to criticism and gossip. " Does any one in Lausanne still do me the honour to be interested in my affairs ? " he wrote his aunt. " And do they discuss my wife ? I suppose not, and I doubtless owe to Robespierre and Collet d'Herbois the forgetfulness of the public. They scarcely deign to mention those whom they have guillotined, and between the guillotine and what I have suffered there is no comparison." Still more in Brunswick would he be uneasy in the consciousness of being discussed and criticized, and it was no doubt a wish to override all gossip by the haughtiness of his demeanour that led him to consult his aunt about the possibility of his acquiring the right to wear the military uniform of his despised Switzerland, which would lend an air of grandeur to his reappearance at a Court where everybody wore some kind of a uniform, and *foreigners that of their own country*.

His premonitions of a cool reception in Brunswick were more than justified. This independent, sarcastic, indifferent young Swiss, with his frankly Jacobin sympathies, had never been very popular. The unfailing kindness of the Duke, who was ready to adjust their relations in any way Benjamin preferred, promising him a continuance of his salary if he desired to make his residence elsewhere, scarcely could offset the open hostility of the Heir Apparent and of his Duchess, whom Benjamin called Bacala and She-Bacala. " As long as the father lives they will tolerate me, but if he dies I shall be cast off," was his prophecy. The discomfort of his situation was increased by the reappearance of Minna, who had been relieved from attendance at Court at the same time that he had been, but who now, either by command of the Duchess or to assert her indifference, presented herself boldly at Court functions, and flaunted herself before him, " humming, coughing,

1794 taking snuff with great ostentation " to his disgust and embarrassment. The stories of her continued misconduct which reached him were also wounding to his dignity, her latest escapade having been to " try to get herself abducted by an Englishman " at the same time that she was intriguing with a German, sampling all nations with great impartiality. The effect of all this on Benjamin was to make him avoid the Court and resume his old habits of solitude.

His hermit's life was the more undisturbed, because during his absence two of his best friends had died. One was an elderly waiting lady to the Duchess, who had been a great comfort to him during his tribulations with Minna, but who loved him, he confessed, more than he did her. The other, Jacob Mauvillon, friend and collaborator of Mirabeau and a prominent Jacobin, had been his only intimate companion in Brunswick. One friend still remained, M. de Féronce, the Duke's most trusted minister, who had been Benjamin's counsellor in the proceedings against Minna, and who was now conducting the arrangements for their divorce. Féronce had travelled much, was well read, and consequently, although forty years older than Benjamin, was congenial to him by his breadth of outlook and his fondness for study and philosophy. " The only minister I have ever seen," wrote Benjamin, " who was the friend and protector of all who love liberty and knowledge." He was, however, timid and disposed to be swayed by public opinion, and he showed Benjamin that he despaired of his being able to live down his unpopularity or to retain his position at the Court. Notwithstanding these discouragements and losses, Benjamin looked back with envy on this solitary life in Brunswick, when, in 1804, he was suffering from a surfeit of the society and exactions of Mme. de Staël.

" Ten years ago I was in Germany, alone, pleading against my wife, unjustly treated by most of my friends, and blamed by those who despised me for the weakness with which I allowed myself to be oppressed. Yet, in the midst of all this, I was perfectly happy—I was alone there, and I was at work. Every day dawned with the promise of a succession of tranquil hours which nothing could disturb. Every night I went to bed with the pleasure of reflecting that the next day I should begin again a similar day. That is now the time in my life I recall with the greatest pleasure." (*J. I.*)

What was the work he was engaged upon, which gave him such peace and satisfaction as he viewed it through the idealizing mist of years? We learn from his letters that two compositions

were occupying him—the *History of Religions*, already begun some 1794
years before, and completed as far as its thirty-seventh chapter during the spring of 1794; the other, a projected life of his friend, Mauvillon.

The son of a French professor in the University of Leipsic, and later at Brunswick, Mauvillon was distinguished as a man of letters as well as an authority in military science. He was, however, by taste and education essentially a scholar rather than a soldier, and far from confining his studies to the subjects of French and German military science, which he had taught in the Universities of Germany, and on which he was an acknowledged authority, he was deeply interested in philosophy and economics, he was a proficient linguist, and had a profound knowledge of Freemasonry. He had translated several of the French philosophers into German, as well as a work on economics by Turgot, and he had written a life of the Duke of Brunswick. His revolutionary creed had been acquired, or at all events formed, under the influence of Mirabeau, who, having been invited by the Duke to visit Brunswick in the summer of 1786, had spent three months there, preparing his *History of the Prussian Monarchy under Frederic II.* So extensively did Mirabeau avail himself of Mauvillon's wide economic and statistical information, that this book was often ascribed to Mauvillon, and their published correspondence shows how great was the debt to him. To his intercourse with this well-known Jacobin sympathizer, who was practically ostracized in Brunswick, Benjamin undoubtedly owed much of his sympathy for the principles of constitutional government which he later developed, and also the beginnings of his enthusiasm for German literature and philosophy. When, on the 31st of January, he received the news at Colombier that Mauvillon had died, almost deserted by his friends, and leaving a widow and several children, he wrote sadly to Mme. de Nassau:

"The man of letters who possessed all the qualities which agreed with my own, he who during five years of ennui and vexation consoled, sustained and encouraged me, he but for whom, in short, I would have died or become as stupid as my environment, the friend of Liberty and of enlightenment, this man whose universally lofty opinions, on morals, politics, religion, agreed in all points with mine, . . . is dead. . . . I always came out of his presence wiser, more energetic, more animated. . . . I have never felt such grief. . . . It is the first time that death has taken from me some one who was personally dear to me."

1794 In his determination to write his friend's biography, which doubtless was formed soon afterwards, he was encouraged by Mme. de Charrière, who saw in such a work an effective forerunner of the more ambitious *History of Religions*, which should bear to the latter some such relation as that of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* to *L'Esprit des Lois*. The opportunity of introducing German literature to the French also appealed to him, and he proposed to translate at least a portion of Mauvillon's writings into French. This was to be his occupation during the coming summer, and upon his arrival in Brunswick his first visit, after seeing M. de Féronce, and paying his respects to the Duke, was upon Mauvillon's widow. In an interview of two hours he obtained from her the outline of her husband's life, which she had already prepared for him, and set to work at once upon its elaboration. On his way to Brunswick he had visited the fine library at Göttingen, and this, together with his months at Colombier, had revived all his old zeal for study. From this time his letters are full of the interest he felt in his work. The *History of Religions* was to be finished first and then the biography, and meanwhile he was also preparing a *Dissertation on the Decree of the King of Prussia Limiting Religious Freedom*, the manuscript of which he sent to Huber.

Usually feminine influence counted for much in the enthusiasm he brought to any undertaking, and it is possible that his ardour for this new work was heightened by the pleasant society of Mme. Mauvillon. Her co-operation was earnest and helpful, and undoubtedly agreeable, and he conceived a great admiration for her character and intelligence, but it is unnecessary to adopt the inferences of Sainte-Beuve and Gaullieur, who try to find here another romance to add to Benjamin's already sufficiently complicated love affairs. His tribute to her is chivalrous, but not amorous.

"I am with her two or three hours every day. While her husband lived she never appeared when I was with him; I knew her only through his praise of her. I even believed that he exaggerated—Mauvillon's opinion of women having always appeared to me ridiculously flattering to this feeble, frivolous and inconsequent half of our feeble, frivolous and inconsequent species. I now know whence he derived this opinion. Married at twenty-seven with a fortune of twelve pounds (French), to a woman who had nothing, he succeeded, thanks to his labour and to her economy, in living not only without difficulty but comfortably. More than once he has said to me that no man was ever happier in his home, and what I see daily in the woman, whom my affection for her

husband has inspired with so much trust, proves that he did not exaggerate." (To Mme. de Charrière, April 29, 1794.) 1794

Her friendlessness and poverty excited his compassion. Their intimacy progressed rapidly, and their daily interviews, which the biography necessitated, deepened his impression of her superior endowments. His appreciation of her charms was not diminished by her readiness to flatter his weaknesses, a means of winning favour with the sterner sex which she was not the first to employ. He was delighted when she wrote him in German, what Mme. de Charrière had already said in French :

" Come back, come back, with all your weakness, all your faults, with your indecision, your vacillations — with all your little peculiarities. If you lose one particle of it all I should no longer know you, I should no longer have the same faith, the same delight in you."

In this peaceful companionship and these scholarly pursuits, Benjamin believed he was at last to realize the delights of solitude for which he yearned. The " Brunswickians " were amazed at the change in him, at the regularity of his life. " Never saint lived as I do ! " he wrote. He rose at seven, went for his bath, was home at nine, and worked until one. After dining alone, he dressed and went to Mme. Mauvillon's, sometimes stopping on the way home to see M. de Féronce about the progress of the divorce proceedings. By five or six he was at work again, and at eight he went to the Club where he read the papers in perfect silence. He was in bed by half-past ten. There is no allowance in this programme for the Court or the gambling table, so it is to be assumed that he avoided them both.

It was his ambition to be honest and moderate in the opinions he expressed in the biography, but the standard he set was difficult to preserve in those days of strong prejudices and of discouraging developments. It was partly responsible for the collapse of his book for, with the opposition to his views that he met everywhere, and the unkind judgments upon his friend that he had daily to hear from the " fools " he encountered, his dispassionate biography was rapidly developing into a bitter polemic. Even those he had counted as Mauvillon's friends were timid about encouraging him, and one reputed Democrat who had narrowly escaped the privilege of hanging for his principles, failed to grant to Benjamin's enterprise that co-operation which his unpopularity seemed to promise. The idle and trivial talk he heard from the *émigrés* who swarmed

1794 in Brunswick, almost drove Benjamin to ultra-revolutionist allegiance, and his efforts to write betrayed him continually into fiery digressions which must inevitably spoil his book for the moderate reader. Considering that after all it was for the love of his friend and the pleasure of the task that he was writing, he determined to abandon the " moderate reader " and to address himself only to the limited circle who thought as he did. " It is to this unknown public," he wrote Mme. de Charrière, " that I raise my altar, as the Ancients did to the Unknown Gods. As to the Known Gods, they are vile little devils, or absurd little apes, who will never have my worship." But the life of Mauvillon was destined never to be offered to any gods, known or unknown.

His peaceful routine was rudely disturbed before he had a chance to become weary of it. His unpopularity at Court was not diminished by the intimacy with the Jacobin's widow, and his friends there urged him to return to Switzerland without awaiting the termination of the divorce proceedings. Perhaps the pretext of having to get his certificate of birth for the lawyers was genuine —Rosalie says he returned to wind up his father's business—at all events he found it convenient to go to Switzerland the last of July. He quitted Brunswick in the full enjoyment of all his offices and emoluments, and ostensibly with the intention of returning in due time ; but before the occasion for doing so had offered, he had met Mme. de Staël and the whole course of his life was altered. From this time we hear nothing of Mme. Mauvillon or of her husband's biography. This is also the last of Minna, at least so far as he was concerned. He saw her once more, when he revisited Brunswick with Charlotte, in 1811, at a soirée given by the Lord Chamberlain. The fact is entered in his journal without comment. She died February 27, 1823, and several years afterwards, when he was Deputy for Alsace, her memory was revived for him by a letter from a notary in Brunswick who claimed to have loaned her money and who, in soliciting payment, took the occasion to proclaim himself his " brother in the struggle for political freedom "—" Vive Benjamin Constant ! Vivent les Parisiens ! Vive la France ! " This gratifying testimony to the popularity of the principles which had once brought him into such disrepute in Brunswick, very probably failed to have the desired effect, for Benjamin was averse to unnecessary disbursements, and he had long ago closed that chapter of his life in which Minna had figured.

He came back to Switzerland disheartened, fretful, impatient.

Everywhere he found pettiness and narrowness and lack of under- 1794
standing. Even the lake repelled him with its "annoying severity of character." As he became more conscious of the "immense abysses" which separated him from Mme. de Charrière, his intercourse with her was perpetually disturbed by his "double-ironies," and by her "dark Radcliffian hints." In September they quarrelled over the "Nature of Things."

"What need is there that we should always be of the same opinion? . . . As to what you say about the Nature of Things, alas! I do not understand any too well what is the Nature of Things. . . . Yet what difference does it make whether I or another makes this mistake? The greatest mistake will always be not to be of your opinion!"

To which, after an exhaustive discussion of his views, she retorted:

"You often mock me, which is blighting. You never fail to put some disdainful, disparaging word in every letter. To-day it is 'Alas, I do not know what the Nature of Things is!' You do not doubt, I suppose, that everything has a nature, and if I say that it is your nature to mock, you will deny it. I do not know what the 'alas' is for, nor the disdain. Shall I reply to that at greater length? That would be to bring upon myself another disdainful expression. I am not anxious for that. Therefore I do not reply, and you reproach me with being laconic. 'My advising, my laconic friend, tell me,' etc. But if I am advising to the point of annoying you, I am not yet sufficiently laconic. I have said enough when I have said, '*It is not necessary to marry either a Miss Fonger or a Charlotte*'; and here is the whole subject of advice, and that of Charlotte both forbidden as well as the other. Very well, but do not expect me to write freely. . . . If you write me any more letters like that I received to-night, I shall not be your laconic friend, I shall be your dumb friend." (September 18.)

To this she added a spiteful little fable of forty-six lines entitled "The Lion and the Monkey," of which a few lines, translated into English, will give a sufficient idea:

"In the royal court of a Lion sage,
Gallant and brave, in the flower of his age,
A certain old monkey was allowed;
The king for this courtier close friendship avowed.
The one described with graceful charm
The fine exploits of his valiant arm,
And the laurels he gathered every day,
Either in pleasure or amours gay.
The monkey was wont to listen with greed . . .
. . . . . .

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Giving advice which was oft ill-received.
Ended was his own life-story,
For his own exalting he had no desire.
Of the Lion alone he sought the glory,
Ice for himself, for another fire."

(But the lion, spoiled by the adulation of the world, reminded the monkey of the immense difference that separated them.)

"I permit a monkey at times to amuse
By an infantile trick, a clever device,
Flatter me, joke with me, drive off my blues,
But argue, never! Beware of advice!"

So the disheartened monkey withdrew from the Court, saying:

"'Adieu, I depart as a hermit to dream!'
With a bow and a jump and a sardonic grin, he
Escaped. To return? He was not such a ninny!"

Benjamin's tenacity in friendship was remarkable, and his terror of inflicting pain made him an easy prey to feminine tears, even when he was becoming restive under their tyranny. He apologized like a gentleman. This clinging to the tyrant, even while he had begun to chafe under her despotism, is very typical of him. It is the theme of *Adolphe*, the burden of the *Journal Intime*.

"I am tossed and dragged about by my miserable weakness," he wrote in his journal during his efforts to free himself from Mme. de Staël. "Never was there anything so ridiculous as my indecision. Now marriage, now solitude; now Germany, now France; hesitation upon hesitation, and all because at bottom *I am unable to give up anything*!" A distinguished psychologist, commenting upon this passage says, "He can't *get mad* at any of his alternatives, and the career of a man beset by such all-round amiability is hopeless."[1] It was his remarkable ability to stand off and view himself, in all his weakness and inconsequence, to turn his keenly analytical intellect relentlessly upon himself, that saved Banjamin from being the *fiasco* his father was. In his mature years he succeeded in holding himself to a fixed political ideal, and gave to his public life the unity that his moral nature failed to attain.

How long his moorings in the port of Colombier would have continued to hold, against all these strains and jerks, it is difficult

[1] William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Chapter on "Saintliness."

to say; for the psychological moment for the entrance of Mme. 1794
de Staël had arrived. Nine days after this humble apology, Benjamin and the Ambassadress met on the Lausanne high road, and from that moment Mme. de Charrière knew that her hour had struck.

The *dénouement* was the more cruel because Mme. de Staël was one of her pet aversions. It was in vain that the hyperbolic lady had poured out encomiums of Mme. de Charrière's literary achievements, such as—"I know nothing which I would prefer to the pleasure of reading one of your novels without stopping; I think that it would distract me from the Revolution"; . . . "I wish you would not stop writing. Every line would be a consolation for every one who is capable of feeling." Mme. de Charrière was always suspicious of gush and extravagance. Recalling a visit from Mme. de Staël, she wrote Benjamin:

"Last year she left me ravished and charmed, but the glory faded when I recalled her in detail. . . . I know no points upon which we can agree even moderately. She let me see through all sorts of vulgarities, pluming herself upon her *esprit* as much as if she had none; on her titled friends as if M. de Staël had taken her but yesterday from the entresol of a dressmaker; and on the society of Paris as if she were from the country and had been there only six weeks. She praised me quite as much this time as ever, and gave me two little cat-pats in revenge for *Zulma*.[1] 'One needs no *esprit*, only talent, to write novels; it's only in *Caliste*, etc.,' and apropos of *Adèle de Senanges*, 'It's no great thing; the theme is something like the *Lettres de Lausanne*.'[2] I smiled and applauded this last little scratch. . . . She is an agreeable woman to listen to, but it would be madness to want to be intimate with her, any more than with Molé,[3] playing marvellously well the prettiest possible rôle. There is nothing genuine. We will amuse ourselves talking her over together. I was impatient to have you see her." (September 24, 1794.)

The anticipated amusement was never realized. Two weeks later she was writing a friend how Constant, who "did not want to know Mme. de Staël, to-day knows her and admires her"; and on the 11th of October she wrote to Benjamin, "To-day you have dined at Mme. de Staël's. . . . You will have uttered and heard plenty of witticisms, you will have laughed openly and perhaps secretly too, and you will have been made over and

[1] One of her books which Mme. de Charrière had criticized.
[2] A novel by Mme. de Charrière.
[3] A French actor who played comic "Dandy" parts.

1794 recreated. . . . You find yourself just now a very amiable Constantinus." . . . "Stay where you are, dear Constantinus. It is not good weather at Colombier, while it is fine at Mézeri. Besides, you say you would be here but a short time. . . . It will be better to get accustomed to living without you, sooner or later."

To her protégée, Mlle. L'Hardy, she admitted that she had quarrelled with Mme. de Staël's new friend, to the degree that she now perceived that he was "very ugly, with little eyes like beads, red hair, yellow blotches all over his face." "Out upon pretence!" she cried. "If I were a fool, even an arch-fool, I would see him as he is!" "It may be that you found me as usual, it may be that you found me quite different," she wrote after seeing him again. "I suppose that you have talked to M. Huber. What a delightful and commendable thing it is to be loyal to Germany, and to Lausanne and to Colombier! It is the way not to be loyal to anything!"

These were some of the "little pins" that she used to tell her publishers she liked to stick into her readers! They were neither lovers' quarrels nor matrimonial quarrels, she wrote Benjamin when she was returning one of his notes which had bored her by its rhapsodies over the Ambassadress; they were more bitter and more hopeless. "As to the satellite you say that I wanted to make of you," she wrote in one of them, "nothing is so false, because planets and satellites shine in heaven and are looked up to by the inhabitants of the earth. Shine as much as you please, shine alone, but unless you wish to put me entirely out of harmony, do not recede from me, do not travel through the skies without me." So their anger ebbed and flowed, first on one side and then on the other. In December it was Benjamin, who was "so busy escorting Hüberchen from house to house and from dinner to dinner," that he had not a moment to answer her "charming letters"; then it was Mme. de Charrière, declining to receive him at Colombier on account of her husband's ill-health—the necessity of preparing invalid diet would make it difficult for her to meet the tastes of a man who required meat and bouillon, when she herself could live on turnips, and needed very little of her "own kin such as calves, sheep and pigs." "I heard you say 'we' of another family; I heard you say, 'the circle in which I live,' 'the house where I pass eleven hours out of the twenty-four.' It is better appointed than this one, because it is more opulent, and not in a starving country; I preferred that you should remain there." (December 25, 1794.)

The career, "half amorous, half political," which he was now 1795
entering upon under the direction of Mme. de Staël, displeased her no less than the airs he was assuming. In January when he proposed to reopen their correspondence, she wrote him at Mézeri, Mme. de Staël's country house near Lausanne :

"I like neither your way of life nor your friends—nor your politics. I wrote you at the beginning of the Revolution, 'If you go to Paris and affiliate yourself with a certain set of people, that is the end of our intimacy!' Eighteen months ago I begged you not to place yourself under the banner of any one in Germany. Now you are under banners, or under wings, and there you argue and write. You no longer suit me in the least, and as you have no need of me, we must stay as we are." (January 26, 1795.)

When he came to see her with his hair so carefully arranged, and in his yellow breeches, and with all the elegance of his amber perfume, she saw no semblance of the old Benjamin—she saw only the stamp of Mme. de Staël and her father, and all her train of followers, upon him.

"My God, how angry I should have been a year ago," she wrote Huber, "had any one predicted that he would be running about as a political lackey, factotum of Mme. de Staël : offering patronage, beginning things and not finishing them, asking questions and repeating them after the answers are given! In addition to all the misery it has caused, the Revolution has made Fools!" (May 1795.)

When, in the spring following Benjamin's meeting with Mme. de Staël, he accompanied her to Paris, Mme. de Charrière, while deigning to hope that no harm would befall "a single golden hair of his head," confessed that her heart would not be broken if a few humiliations were heaped upon the "celebrated daughter of the illustrious Necker." And when the summer brought back to Colombier rumours of the laurels he was winning in Paris as a drawing-room wit, far from being proud that her pupil was shining on so large a stage, she fell to analysing his foibles to Mlle. L'Hardy, much as she had already picked to pieces his distinguished physiognomy. Love of women and love of fine phrases, she said, were his two great passions ; and his political ambitions were dismissed in terms his worst enemy on the Royal Right might have been glad to borrow for use in the elections.

"It is not that his intentions are changed, for he has no intentions. He struggled to make himself believe that the Republic was good,

1796 but could not, and the commotion he raised was only for the pleasure of doing it. It was often anger, too, sometimes against me, sometimes against the rulers, and then he wanted to attach himself to some one, to some party, and he preferred that of the people who proclaimed Liberty. But even supposing something which in fact is not true—suppose he had opinions—might he not then have changed them? Unfortunately, I am sure he has not changed them. He had no opinions and he has no opinions. To-day he is agitated by the same motive as last year, if ever weariness and unrest and desire to make a sensation can be called motives." (July 1795.)

In March 1796, when he returned from Paris for a short respite from political agitations, he came again to see her, but her icy manner was unmelted. The necessity of omitting all reference to Necker or his daughter made the meeting constrained for them both. "He amused me by the subtlety of his wit," she wrote, "but he wearies me more or less by his ebullitions, and excites a little pity by the undercurrent of sadness I think that I perceive in him." Had she known that even then he had begun to tug at the chains her rival had thrown about him, it might have afforded her an unholy, but entirely pardonable satisfaction. Her prejudice did not allow her to perceive how greatly Mme. de Staël's education had improved him; she thought him "just as vacillating and more egotistical than ever," while he had lost "a certain frankness and gentleness of expression that used to go with it." Even when forced to admit the brilliancy, force and rhetorical merits of his famous speech against Bonaparte's Special Tribunal Bill, she still refused to believe in his ultimate success in political life, and was triumphant over his exclusion from the Tribunal in 1802, which she interpreted as a confirmation of her prophecy. "A rude awakening," she called it, with unconcealed satisfaction, "from a dream in which he fancied himself a kind of statesman, whom Fate, his talents and reputation were to link with the destiny and glory of the French Republic." "I think that is ended for ever," she added. "Constant will never be anything in France but a man of *esprit*, slightly esteemed."

Thus keenly, but imperfectly, did she estimate the talents and future relation to history of the young man upon whom she had lavished six years of her devotion and affection. But, after all, it was at Mme. de Staël rather than at Benjamin that all these severe and bitter things were directed. In her heart she still held him dear, and she even confessed to him that some of her friends, observing the pleasure with which she welcomed a letter from him,

remarked that " certain threads are fine and become imperceptible, 1796–
but they do not break." [1] 1805

Their correspondence, though fitful, was never entirely broken off, because he would not permit it to be; but it had lost its spontaneity, and was henceforth chiefly concerned with her books, for which she was not too proud to solicit his interest when she wanted a Paris publisher. " Though my character is both harsh and changeable," he wrote her in 1796, " my heart never varies, and I am bound to you by all the recollections, all the regrets, and I may add, in spite of you, by many hopes." In renouncing this intimacy he was bidding farewell to what, notwithstanding some irritations that he had suffered from it, was the most satisfactory, though not the most inspiring, attachment of his whole life. In losing him, she was losing the greatest interest of her existence, and that at a time when she could not hope to find another to fill its place. Amid the growing disabilities of old age, she continued to reign, it is true, in the circle of young people (her " menagerie of freaks," she called them) she had gathered about her, and whom she presumably found more docile than Benjamin. But few remained of the pleasant company he had known at Colombier. Louise, to be sure, still tended the garden, and Mlle. L'Hardy continued to minister to her patroness in her last days, with great devotion. And so she passed the evening of life—" a life at once so active and so empty," says her biographer—no longer caring to read or write, playing checkers with her friends, and playing badly, while her poodle promenaded over the writing-table, now littered with cards and pins and counters instead of manuscript; until one December day, in 1805, after weeks of suffering, she died. Her last letter, which she was dictating to little Thérèse Forster (whom she had taken as a sort of attendant), was to Benjamin. It was never finished, and Thérèse enclosed it to him with the announcement of her death. It reached him at Coppet, after a performance of *Mérope* at the château, in which he had assisted. " A complete

[1] In the summer of 1804 he recorded in his journal a visit from a former servant of hers, " which vividly reçalled to me the years I had spent with Mme. de Charrière. It is seven years since I have seen her; it is ten since all relations between us ceased. How easily then I used to break all ties which wearied me! How sure I felt of making new ones at will! How I felt myself in full possession of life, and what a difference ten years have made in my feelings. All seems uncertain and ready to slip away from me. What I have does not make me happy. But I have passed the age where the vacancies are refilled, and I fear to give up anything whatsoever, not feeling the power to replace anything."

1794–1805 success," he noted in his journal, referring to the play; and he added, "I hear of the death of Mme. de Charrière de Tuyll: another devoted friend gone! The world of my heart is being depopulated." He had already been notified of her approaching end, and he says in the *Cahier Rouge* that, had not her extreme weakness rendered his visit inadvisable, he would certainly have gone once more to see her. Perhaps so; but he was just then much preoccupied with troubles and problems which may easily have overshadowed his anxiety for his old friend.

Yet Benjamin insisted that he really lived much more in the past than in the present, and undoubtedly Mme. de Charrière became more vivid and precious to him as her personality receded. Five years after her death he wrote Mme. de Nassau, who was visiting in Neuchâtel, "Did you pass Colombier? That spot is deeply impressed upon my memory. If, as I think, there is a meeting in another world, Mme. de Charrière is one of the people I shall seek with the greatest eagerness." Once again, in 1810, she was recalled to him, when he was commissioned to write several notices, one of them of her life and work, for Michaud's *Biographical Dictionary*. He wrote to Rosalie and to Neuchâtel for some details of her early life, and of the publication of her books previous to his acquaintance with her. It would have been interesting to be able to place this sketch beside those he wrote of Julie Talma, and of Mme. de Staël, in the gallery of the women he had loved, but the enterprise of the Dictionary met with obstacles and was temporarily abandoned, and even the manuscript of his notice of Mme. de Charrière, if he ever got so far as writing it, has disappeared.

With the close of his intimacy with Mme. de Charrière the first and formative period of Benjamin's life terminates. Up to this time he cannot be said to have gratified the expectations of his friends, or to have fulfilled the promise of his youth, or, indeed, to have justified the pains of a serious biographer, except in so far as he affords a remarkable psychological study. But in the light of the interesting and picturesque public career upon which he was about to enter, these years of development are significant, and the friendship with Mme. de Charrière, while failing to give a positive direction to his life, was fraught with influence, both for good and evil. Moreover, in his letters to her, from which such extensive quotations have been given, we see him at his best and at his worst—graceful, affectionate, spontaneous, selfish, conceited, but genuine, as we shall never be able to see him in any other correspondence. Of that with Mme. de Staël we shall never be able to judge, since the pre-

cautions of her children have deprived the world of what would no doubt have been a priceless collection, quite independently of its private and personal revelations. But even if we had it, it is safe to say that it could not have surpassed in freshness and charm these letters of his youth to the middle-aged woman who was the first to win his confidence and cultivate his *esprit*. If the minuteness with which their quarrels have been depicted appears to belittle this extraordinary friendship, it has nevertheless been indispensable to the understanding of Benjamin's complex and contradictory nature. For the rest, we can only beg indulgence for words which were never intended for public perusal, and the leniency in judgment which our own consciousness of potential weakness and folly should demand from each one of us. 1794–1805

CHAPTER IX

MADAME DE STAËL

(1787–1796)

1787 IT is difficult to understand how the brilliant and prominent young Swiss, who had enjoyed not only the intimacy of Suard's circle but the *entrée* to many equally distinguished salons, could have escaped meeting Necker's daughter during that winter and spring of 1787 which he had spent in Paris. Her marriage to the Swedish ambassador, Baron de Staël-Holstein, had been one of the social events of the previous winter, for the Queen herself had taken a lively interest in the match, and had intervened to secure the special honours and privileges demanded by the ambitious banker for the man upon whom he bestowed the hand of his only child. By the time that Benjamin arrived in Paris with his father and cousin, Mme. de Staël's salon already outshone her mother's, and such was the extravagance of her hospitality that the Queen had felt it necessary to rebuke her. The Constants and Neckers had been acquainted in Switzerland, and the Swiss who came to Paris naturally sought their great compatriot, of whom they were justly proud. On his part he welcomed them cordially, for he had had every reason to know what social and religious prejudices the Swiss Protestants encountered when attempting to enter the *haute société* of Paris. Nevertheless Fate had decreed that the meeting of these two famous friends should not occur there. Although Charles Constant recorded in his journal his own presence at two entertainments at the Swedish Embassy, and his impressions of the much-discussed Mme. de Staël, he makes no mention of Benjamin as having accompanied him.

Between that year of 1787 when they might have met in Paris, and the autumn of 1794, when they actually did meet on the shores of Lake Geneva—years which Benjamin was idling away far from the stage of the world's great drama, along the country roads of England, in the peaceful domesticity of Colombier, or in

MADAME DE STAËL

By permission of Brentano.

the dreary atmosphere of the Brunswick Court—Mme. de Staël 1792
was playing a stirring part in the events of the French Revolution. She had beheld with enthusiasm the opening of the States General, she had witnessed with horror the march of the women on Versailles, and after the massacre at the Tuileries she had assisted many terror-stricken refugees to escape. After the fall of the Bastille, the second recall of her father, amid the delirious joy of the mob whose idol he had become, was the crowning moment of her joy and pride in him—the last happy moment of her life, she has said —for her father, clumsy and pompous and even ridiculous as he has often been represented by the statesmen and historians of his day—" the watch that was always slow "—was in her opinion the greatest, wisest and most misunderstood of men. Devotion to him was one of the great passions of her life—that life which was convulsed by so many great passions. She was destined to experience only too soon the fickleness of that populace whose adoration had so thrilled her, and to see her father driven from his post by the hatred of those very mobs who had so lately proclaimed him the saviour of France, and forced to flee to his country seat in Switzerland, never to return.

Meanwhile the great tide of emigration had set in, and she had dedicated her influence and her prestige as the wife of the Swedish ambassador to the aid of her panic-stricken friends. She had sheltered in her own house, at the greatest peril to herself, her friends Narbonne and Montmorency and Beaumetz, and with fearless eloquence had succeeded in persuading Manuel to spare the lives of Lally Tollendal and of Jaucourt. After the September massacres in the prisons, yielding to the entreaties of her family, she had fled herself from the sickening scenes of carnage, taking with her the proscribed Abbé Montesquiou disguised as her servant, but had been arrested at the *barrières* of Paris, and released from the Hôtel de Ville only on the strength of her inviolability as an ambassador's wife. From Switzerland she had continued to aid the refugees, and even shared, in spite of Necker's disapproval, the exile of some of her favourites in England, where a brilliant, if rather unconventional, colony of *émigrés* were gathered together at Juniper Hall in Surrey. Gossip had already been busy with her ; for her contempt for the conventionalities, her impulsiveness, her enthusiasm and a certain *abandon* in her devotion to her male friends, exposed her to the charge of taking an interest more than Platonic in the fascinating Norbonne, the unscrupulous Talleyrand, and even in the gentle and pious Mathieu de Montmorency.

1794 Although Fate had excluded Benjamin from a share in all these stirring events, he had by no means been unaware of Mme. de Staël's activities, and, perhaps influenced by Mme. de Charrière's disparaging criticisms, he had been unfavourably impressed by the fame of the "Ambassadress." When her *Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine* appeared, he and Barbet had made merry over its crude literary style and its false sentiment :

"Mme. de Staël has no more feeling than Muset,[1] when writing her Apology for the Queen. What a platitude this is—'brilliant and trifling as happiness and beauty.' The idea is false. Happiness is neither brilliant nor trifling. And then the antitheses, the cadenced phrases, when one has before his eyes the picture of such long and frightful torments ! It is as if you were to spit on it ! " (To Mme. de Charrière, September 25, 1793.)

To which Mme. de Charrière rejoined :

"We are of the same opinion. To me her *esprit* is not simple, or always just, and her sentiment is merely *esprit*. Yet if you were to see her, you would admire her. To comprehend well, to reply well, to express yourself with grace, rapidity and elegance, is so rare that it must be admired. Nevertheless, I should not care at all for the intimate or even the occasional society of Mme. de Staël." (September 28, 1793.)

Notwithstanding this verdict, it was apparently at her suggestion that on the 19th of September 1794 Benjamin undertook to pay a visit to the celebrated lady of Coppet. On the 30th he wrote Mme. de Charrière from Lausanne :

"My expedition to Coppet was fairly successful. I did not find Mme. de Staël there, but I overtook her on the road, was taken into her carriage, and took the drive from Nyon here with her ; have supped, breakfasted, dined, supped, then breakfasted again with her, so that I have seen and above all heard her very well. It seems to me that you judge her a little severely. I think her very energetic, very imprudent, very talkative, but good, trusting, and sincerely devoted. A proof that she is not merely a talking machine is the lively interest she takes in those she has known who are afflicted. She has just succeeded, after three disappointing and fruitless attempts, in saving from prison and in getting out of France a woman who was her enemy while she was in Paris, and who had tried to proclaim her hatred for her in every way. That is more than mere chatter. I think that her activity

[1] A dog belonging to Mme. de Charrière. Godet notes that the passage they criticized was corrected in a later edition.

is a necessity as well as a virtue, but she uses it in doing good." 1794
(September 30, 1794.)

This is a perfectly fair and cool appreciation of the impulsive generosity of Mme. de Staël; but his admiration increased so rapidly that within a month he was no longer able to summon so judicial a spirit in describing her.

"I do not find it difficult to 'toss' her, as you say, a compliment. On the contrary, I find it difficult, since I have known her better, not to launch forth in ceaseless praise of her, and not to afford to all to whom I speak the spectacle of my interest and my admiration. I have rarely met such a union of amazing and attractive qualities, such brilliancy, such exactness—a good will so extended, so tolerant, such generosity, a politeness so gentle and so unwearied, such simplicity, unconstraint, in intimate association. She is the second woman I have met who could have filled the whole universe, who could have been a world in herself for me. You know who the first was.

"Mme. de Staël has infinitely more *esprit* in intimate conversation than in society. She understands perfectly how to listen, which neither you nor I supposed she did. She enjoys the wit of others as much as her own. She honours those she likes with an ingenuous and unflagging attention which proves her kindness as much as her intelligence. In short she is a creature apart, a superior being such as is to be met perhaps once in a century, and such that those who draw near to her, know her and are her friends, ought never to ask any other blessing." (October 21, 1794.)

In less than a year "Barbet" had ceased to be numbered in the circle of his most cherished friends, and he was writing to his aunt:

"I have but three dear and sacred objects in the world—my father . . . you (my friend, rather than my aunt) . . . [and] a person whose affection, wit, astonishing and sublime qualities attract and hold me more every day."

During the year which followed her return from England, Mme. de Staël had been conducting an impromptu refugee agency for promoting the interests of her various friends, and especially had she been concerned with trying to find a refuge in Switzerland where she might be permitted to gather about her her brood of pet *émigrés*—Talleyrand, Narbonne, Mathieu—from not one of whom she could endure to be separated. After vainly attempting to secure permission for them to live in Zurich, she had, in the summer

1794 of 1794, rented the château of Mézeri, a mile west of Lausanne, not far from Nyon, where Necker, who had found Coppet untenable since the French invasion of Switzerland, was mourning the recent death of his wife. The château was unpretentious but prettily situated at the foot of a wooded hill, with a tiny hamlet behind it. Here she spent the summer with her friends, the gentle Mathieu de Montmorency, whose brother had recently perished on the guillotine, Théodore de Lameth, Jaucourt, Narbonne, the Swede Ribling, whom she called "the beautiful regicide," and Mathieu's mother, who was said to be enamoured of Narbonne. Already, in September, she had just missed meeting Benjamin, when she had stopped on her way from Zurich at the château of Greng, near the Lake of Morat, the property of a certain eccentric M. de Garville, who kept open house for *émigrés* as well as for some of the Swiss aristocracy, Benjamin being included among these last. It was after spending a few days with her father at Coppet, and when she was driving back to Mézeri, that she was overtaken near Nyon by the long-legged, red-headed, spectacled young man, with the scholarly stoop and careless dress of a German student, and invited him to return to Lausanne in her carriage. They stopped at Rolle for dinner at the house of a M. Rollaz, where there were several other guests from Geneva, who were not entirely to Benjamin's taste. Mme. de Staël and her father had recently been attacked in a newspaper of Lausanne, the *Quinzaine*, and she emphatically declared that the paper ought to be suppressed. It is interesting to note that Benjamin, the future defender of free speech, who has been so often accused of mobility of opinion, expressed himself in opposition to his new friend, "vigorously in favour of the paper and of the unlimited freedom of the press." [1]

The intimacy grew rapidly. During the winter that followed, he became one of the household at Mézeri, which was augmented from time to time by such additional inmates as Lally Tollendal, Mme. de la Châtre, Frédéric de Châteauvieux, Mme. Rilliet-Huber of Geneva, and Mme. de Staël's cousin and future biographer, Mme. Necker de Saussure. In this circle of polished, intelligent and enlightened aristocrats, whose ideals were more like those of the Girondists than of the Royalists, Constant, under the spell of his hostess, had reason to revise his wholesale condemnation of *émigrés*. In the process of modification, it is not surprising that the political opinions of this *malléable* young man became a little mixed.

Mme. de Staël was at that time writing her *Réflexions sur la*

[1] Garville, *Mem. de Norvins.*

Paix,[1] and this study of the results of the recent overthrow of 1795
Robespierre showed that she too was modifying her views and was approaching those of the moderate party in the Convention. She and Benjamin agreed in rejecting the Revolution in so far as it meant Jacobinism, and saw in Barras, Tallien and the other men who had expelled Robespierre, the only hope of Republicanism. Their political sympathies drew them closer together. Huber, who was Constant's guest in Lausanne for two weeks, wrote Thérèse :

" Constant is quite ' gone ' at present, that I can see. He lives for her, in her. He is no happier for it, that is very plain, but one can readily forgive him for being carried away. Shall I try to break it up ? I will not interfere, for why destroy an illusion, which—for a good man, with all the tender qualities of heart which he has, but who has been bungled, so to speak, on the side of the realization of his possibilities and of the true enjoyment of life—why destroy, I say, an illusion which after all, is the highest happiness he can attain ? "

Huber seemed justified in believing that an illusion which was stirring up his manhood, reawakening his ambition, crystallizing his hitherto formless and merely critical opinions—in short impelling him to initiative which was to lead him to usefulness and to fame—must not be disturbed. He had met a mind which evoked the best that was in him, and which responded to all he had to offer. All who saw them together marvelled at the way they developed and stimulated each other. Sismondi, the historian of the Italian Republics, who lived on Lake Geneva, and who became the confidant of them both, said that no one really knew Mme. de Staël until he had seen her with Benjamin.

" His intellectual originality alone could bring out hers. . . . He was thoroughly at his best only at Coppet. When I saw him with his spirit so quenched after her death, it was all that I could do to recognize the former man." (To Mlle. de St. Aulaire, December 13, 1830.)

The Countess de Boigne relates a famous story of a journey she once made from Aix with the celebrated pair, accompanied by Mathieu and Mme. Récamier, and under the escort of a gendarme sent by the police to drive Mme. de Staël out of France. In spite of the disconcerting circumstances, to which was added a terrific

[1] Published anonymously, February 1795. Her friends detected in it evidences of Benjamin's collaboration and influence.

1795 thunderstorm, the party within the carriage sat spellbound, unconscious of their surroundings, listening to the sparkling wit of Benjamin and Mme. de Staël, who were discussing the recently published letters of Mlle. de L'Espinasse.

It is not to be supposed that Mme. de Staël's circle viewed with complacency the growing intimacy with this young Swiss. They whispered that he was not only infatuated with her, but determined to bind her to him by ties that were more than intellectual. They perceived that he was silent, gloomy, a prey to nerves. A story got about that, in the violence of his passion, Benjamin had resorted to his youthful expedient of attempting suicide. At midnight, it was said, cries of agony were heard in the château, and he was discovered writhing in convulsions, and calling for a last interview with the Châtelaine. The entire household was in commotion—all save Mathieu, who was reading the *Confessions of St. Augustine* on his knees. When they broke into his room, calling that Benjamin Constant had poisoned himself, he answered serenely, " Let some one call a doctor," and went on with his devotions. It was after this scene that Mme. de Staël is reported to have told Mme. Rilliet-Huber that Constant was " physically antipathetic " to her. Both the story and the remark, which have come through Sainte-Beuve, have an apocryphal flavour, and may be taken for what they are worth.

Now that the Terror was at an end, and peace was being established, Paris, under the Constitution of the Year III., seemed to promise a career to every lover of liberty. With the advent of spring, the *émigrés* at Mézeri flitted off to the Lake of Bienne, and Benjamin and his friend began to make their plans to return to Paris. They accompanied the departing guests as far as the château of Greng, and a few weeks later, on the 15th or 16th of May, they set out on their journey back to France. " Calm your ambition," wrote Necker anxiously in a parting letter to his daughter, whose eagerness to interfere he apparently anticipated. " Permit me to ask M. Constant not to urge you and to give you frequent lessons in prudence and patience."

They arrived at the *barrières* on the morning of the 25th, four days after the insurrection of the first Prairial which had ended in the complete triumph of the moderate party in the Convention. Their first intimation of what had occurred was the sight of a cart carrying nineteen gendarmes who had been condemned to death under suspicion of having aided the Jacobins in their desperate attempt to regain the power for Robespierre's party. It must

have been a shock for the apostles of Liberty to see this new 1795
Government, of which they had hoped so much, employing quite as sanguinary measures as their predecessors, to learn that military commissions were sitting in judgment on the lives of suspected citizens and so-called Terrorists, and that the prisons were again overflowing, this time with refractory members of the Convention. But under the spell of his companion's enthusiasm, Benjamin's new-found faith and optimism were unshaken. At all events the Robespierre regime was completely vanquished, the tension was relaxed, men looked relieved, and prosperity seemed at hand. On the day after his arrival he wrote his aunt :

" The triumph of the Convention has been as complete as its courage has been sublime. The bloodthirsty men are crushed, the insurgent quarters are disarmed, the guilty members are imprisoned and handed over to judgment. . . . I have not seen a single pale face nor a single beggar. The Jacobins are detested, the Royalists are ridiculed and despised ; peace, order and the Republic are what people want and they will have it. . . . In short, opinion is being formed . . . and we may expect shortly the promulgation of a strong, solid Government. . . . Property and talents, the two reasonable bases of equality among men, will resume their rights, and humanity will have gained by all the sufferings which have oppressed the world through this Revolution." (To Mme. de Nassau, 6 and 10 Prairial, 1795.)

The inspiration of Mme. de Staël is unmistakable here. But as the days passed, and he began to judge for himself, his ardour cooled a little and he became more critical of the Government, although he confessed to finding Paris too absorbing to leave.

" Freedom of speech and of the press is extreme here ; it is unheard of, this union of the most arbitrary power that ever existed on the earth with a licence complete in every direction. The Government possesses everything, fears everything ; it never puts through any measure thoroughly, it does not know how either to adopt principles of Liberty, or to make its dreams of despotism respected, and all this produces a combination of contradictions which has upon society almost the effect of good government." (To Mme. de Nassau, 19 Messidor, 1795.)

It was, indeed, a very different Paris from that in which Benjamin had idled away his nights at the gaming tables, or discussing eighteenth-century philosophy with Mme. de Charrière. That power of rapid reaction which distinguishes the French had exchanged the reign of Terror for a reign of pleasure. Churches

1795 were closed, convents and abbeys were abandoned; Notre-Dame was a storehouse for wine casks, the *Bonnet-rouge* decorated the public buildings, and the palaces of the scattered nobles were used as storehouses, cafés and auction rooms, where all sorts of plunder was exposed for sale—carved and inlaid furniture from looted mansions, mirrors, ornaments, paintings and statues taken from the altars of the saints. The pitiful death of the young Dauphin had removed all fear of a Bourbon restoration, and Paris, in a frenzy of relief and joy, gave itself up to dancing and amusement with the same abandon with which we have seen the whole world rush into excesses of pleasure and extravagance when freed from the horrible nightmare of the World-war. The deserted convents, the mournful palaces whose owners had perished on the guillotine, the prisons so lately crowded with wretched victims, were transformed into dance halls. They turned their heritage of suffering to social uses at balls to which only those whose relatives had perished on the scaffold were admitted, and where the costumes were reproductions of those their friends had worn on their last terrible ride. All sorts of lawless outbreaks made pedestrianism an exciting adventure. "I nearly had my throat cut in the street, but I got out of it very well," Benjamin wrote casually to his aunt.

The Palais Royal, formerly the resort of the aristocracy, under its new name of the Palais Égalité, became the haunt of rowdies and loafers, and the scene of frequent political brawls. Gambling houses multiplied there. "A less optimistic mind than Mme. de Staël's might have perceived that after all there was no less poverty and social inequality than before the Revolution; there had simply been an exchange of places between the rich and the poor," observes an historian of the period.

For it was the time for accumulating great fortunes, which always follows a great war; Fouché, Danton, Tallien, were among those who had acquired vast wealth by their lucky speculations and plunderings. The sale of church property and of the estates of the *émigrés* under the laws of seizure and nationalization, and the floods of worthless paper assignats which had increased the value of gold, afforded great opportunities for speculation. The elegant palaces in the Faubourg St. Germain could be bought for a song, payment being often made in foodstuffs, wine or stolen art treasures. Benjamin wrote his aunt, with whom he was eternally discussing financial matters, that his good Swiss *louis d'or* would buy 500 francs of French paper.

"Although everything appears to be very dear, owing to the 1795
counterfeit value of the assignats, although a dinner . . . costs 100 francs, a coat 3000 francs, yet nowhere can one live so cheap as in Paris. My lodging, consisting of four very attractive rooms, costs me a crown a month in silver, and the rest in proportion. The farmers being obliged to pay half their taxes in kind, the interest on property is prodigious." (To Mme. de Nassau, August 7, 1795.)

The speculating mania seized Benjamin, naturally a gambler, and in August he invested 28,000 francs (Swiss) counting on an interest of 20 per cent. if things went well with the Republic. In his enthusiasm he determined to establish a permanent residence in France, although he recognized that, in case of a counter-revolution, all his acquisitions would be forfeited, and he himself, as a holder of national property, would be forced to flee. There were times when it looked as if that catastrophe were not far distant.

"Every day some storm breaks; we strike against some rock; but so far the ship has not been split, but . . . the most insane optimist could not deny that we are in a much more critical situation than we were a month ago." (October 21, 1795.)

The transformation wrought by Mme. de Staël had affected even his outer man. He, who was once so careless of his personal appearance, now blossomed out as a dandy. In his fashionable coat, and his perfumed and curled locks, he passed for a "Muscadin" in her salon at the Swedish Embassy, where he frequently stayed from two in the afternoon until four in the morning. Mme. de Charrière's young *émigré* friend, Pierre de Roussillon, who saw him in Paris in June, gave that lady an account of the new Benjamin (which must have caused a sensation at Colombier and was perhaps responsible for her protest against her old favourite), "smiling angelically at hearing himself applauded in Paris for expressions which would not have been tolerated at Colombier."

"He is really delightful, if you could see him in society. The salon of the Ambassadress becomes him better than the little study at Colombier. In a large company one makes more effort to please and talks more. . . .[1] If you were not so unsociable, and enjoyed gathering in your study twenty-five persons, of whom one was a

[1] In Switzerland this famous conversationalist had a reputation for taciturnity. When asked why he was so silent, he answered that nothing bored him so much as having to listen, except having to reply.

1795 Girondist, another a Thermidorian, another an out-and-out aristocrat, another a Constitutionalist, another a Jacobin, we could enjoy the spectacle of Constant listened to and appreciated by all. The salon here suits him much better. If he passed only two hours a day there, it would be the best kind of an education for him. But alas! he passes eighteen there, lives entirely in this salon and the salon exhausts him. His health is ruined. . . . That figure which had become elegant, to-day is resuming the stoop which Mlle. Moulas[1] caught so well. . . . I have just come from his rooms. I have been eating cherries with him. . . . He fell asleep in the midst of our lunch. We talked again of our *soirée* and of this Riouffe,[2] of whom I told you yesterday. It is impossible to be wittier than this young man or more felicitous in expression." (11th and 23rd Messidor 1795.)

To the salon of whose motley composition this letter presents a vivid picture, Mme. de Staël's own peculiarities lent distinctive features. According to the *Courrier*, it was the talk of Paris, and the manners of many of the notables who frequented it were said to have been improved by their hostess, who "knew how to fashion her society." With a hospitality which was a mixture of ambition, curiosity and kind-heartedness, she welcomed politicians of every shade and creed, and strove to unite them all in the support of the new Constitution.

"Are you in doubt whether you possess genius?" asked Rousseau, "Go spend a year in Paris, and if you have it you will feel it working in your breast." Benjamin felt the tug of genius unmistakably, but amid the kaleidoscopic changes of theories by which he was confused, his inexperience was at a loss which to choose. Amid the babel of demagogues, proclaiming all sorts of economic systems, and philosophic fads and "political panaceas," it is no wonder that Benjamin was bewildered and lost his head. In his reminiscences of his early political life, vouchsafed in his old age to his young disciple Coulmann, he described this salon of Mme. de Staël's, where he was accustomed to meet:

"Members of the existing government, whose confidence she sought to win; some relics of bygone days whose appearance displeased their successors; all the returned nobility, whom she was at once flattered and uneasy at receiving; writers who had recovered their influence since the 9th Thermidor and some of

[1] Or Moulat. A friend of Mme. de Charrière who made silhouettes (see pp. 73 and 78).

[2] One of the Girondists—author of *Les Mémoires d'un Detenu*—who, according to Sainte-Beuve, introduced Benjamin to the political world.

the Diplomatic Corps, who were at the feet of the Committee of 1795
Public Safety at the same time that they were conspiring against them. Amid the conversation, gesticulations and intriguings of these different parties, my Republican *naïveté* found itself greatly embarrassed. When I talked with the Republican party, who were victorious, I heard that it was necessary to behead the anarchists and shoot the *émigrés* almost without trial. When I approached the little group of disguised Terrorists who had survived, I heard them say that we must exterminate from the government the *émigrés* and the foreigners. When I allowed myself to be persuaded by the Moderates, and the flatterers among the writers who proclaimed the return of morality and justice, they implied at the second sentence that France could not get along without a King, a thing which shocked me strangely. I was uncertain what to do with my enthusiasm for the Republic."

Amid these pitfalls which would have betrayed a wiser head, it behoved a young stranger, lately from a remote little German court, to walk circumspectly. But circumspection was not one of Benjamin's distinguishing qualities. His second thoughts were always better than his first, but he had the ability to perceive his mistakes. The uppermost topic of conversation just then was the "re-election of the Two-Thirds." The Constitution which was about to be adopted contained a clause providing for the retention of two-thirds of the old members of the Convention in the new Corps Législatif, and the manner in which that two-thirds was to be selected was what was agitating the public. The final decision of the Convention that they should be chosen by the Electors instead of by the people was regarded by some as an open usurpation of the few privileges the new Constitution had granted. As a matter of fact, the decree was not constitutional, but it was a political necessity, if the Republican Government was to be maintained; for if the middle classes were to be allowed to elect their representatives before being educated to Republicanism, and before the Government had acquired the confidence of the nation, the Constitution of the Year III. was doomed. In his zeal for the spirit of the Constitution, Benjamin failed to see that the Royalists were secretly encouraging the protests of the Jacobins against the decree, with the object of undermining the Government.

Just one month, therefore, after his arrival in Paris, he entered the political arena in a series of spirited letters (quite in the style of Mme. de Staël), attacking the decree, which were published in the paper of his old patron, Suard, *Les Nouvelles Politiques*. When the army of newly returned Royalists rejoiced in this supposed

1795 reinforcement of their ranks, and sent a delegation to compliment him upon his eloquence and to invite his co-operation in the re-establishment of the Bourbons, Benjamin perceived his mistake and was ready to "fly up in the air, cursing salons, women and journalists." It was still worse to have Louvet, the editor of the *Sentinelle*, and a member of the commission who had prepared the new laws, bitterly attack his letters as "impudent, silly Royalism." Benjamin, as yet not hardened to political abuse, of which he was destined to receive such avalanches before his race was run, was on the point of making an angry reply, when Louvet, who recognized in the brilliant young writer a valuable ally, if he could but be won, made overtures to him, probably through Chénier, and explained to him that the kind of republicanism he had manifested in his letters would kill the Republic by helping its enemies. "I did not know then that I was the only genuine republican in France at that time," Benjamin said when relating the incident. In his haste to repair his blunder he consented to assist Louvet in preparing a speech in support of the very decrees that had been attacked, which should show that a Republic was impossible without the re-election of the Conventionalists; and after labouring upon it for two days and nights, he went to the Convention to hear Louvet deliver it. "But either my parliamentary eloquence had not yet attained perfection, or, as I like to think, because what he had inserted had spoiled my part, or because he could not read the manuscript," Benjamin concluded, "the speech was received with jeers and protests," while its real author, sustained only by his sense of humour, cowered in the audience. Louvet's friends declared that the great Girondist had never spoken so badly. Nevertheless the decrees passed on the 30th of August, tacked to the end of the new Constitution.

The Republic was about to be deprived of the personal supervision of Mme. de Staël. Through her persistent efforts in behalf of her banished friends (Talleyrand, Dupont de Nemours and Lafayette, then imprisoned at Olmutz, not to mention many others less distinguished), she had brought upon herself an open denunciation from the *Tribune* by the Deputy Legendre, in the very presence of her husband. This, together with the reputation of her salon as a centre of intrigue, was embarrassing to the Representative of Sweden, who was already having difficulty to maintain his official position. She was given to understand by the Government that an absence in Switzerland would be greatly appreciated, and now began that long series of wanderings and banishments

and espionage to which the poor woman, justly or unjustly, was 1796
subjected until the Bourbons were finally reinstated, and which did much to unsettle and discredit Benjamin. When he was not sharing her exile, he was pulling wires to obtain permission for her to return to Paris, and the obligation he felt to win favour with the Government in her behalf affected more or less the political stand he adopted during the next four or five years. He accompanied her to Coppet on the 21st of December, and remained in Switzerland until late in the spring, when he returned to Paris to obtain, if possible, the permission of the Directoire for her to reside in or near Paris.

While in Switzerland he continued to demonstrate his loyalty to the Directoire by keeping it informed of the Royalist plottings which were going on there, and also by the composition of a pamphlet in its support, *De la Force du Gouvernment et de l'Importance d'y rallier*,[1] which was printed first in Switzerland, and appeared in serial form in Paris, May 1 to 9, in the official paper, the *Moniteur*. The failure of the Constitution to provide the new Government with sufficient powers to protect itself against surprises and discontent, and the evident weakness of the Directoire on the eve of the new elections, had encouraged its enemies, and Benjamin called upon all friends of freedom to rally to its support lest, in the event of its fall, they should themselves be buried under its ruins. He urged the electors to cease talking about men and vote for principles. "Hate tyranny itself, not this or that form of it," was his slogan. Mme. de Staël, who had been preparing her treatise on *Les Passions* at the same time that Benjamin was writing this pamphlet, always claimed to have collaborated in it, and offered it as an argument for her return to France, since it proved her unswerving devotion to the Directoire. "It was entirely composed in my house and under my own roof," she pleaded. The style confirms her claims in many points, as for example, the following rhetorical flourish:

> "It will triumph, it is not to be doubted. At its voice all the thinkers of Europe will hasten, all whom fresh acts of despotism would have revolted, who thought to behold the black and disastrous night of the fourteenth century advancing, all those in truth who in their eagerness for Liberty have come to seek in France, perils, to be sure, but also a cause to defend. . . . Truth will be their religion, history their legend; the great men of antiquity their saints; liberty their life."

[1] Translated into German; appeared in Huber's paper, *Die Neue Klio*.

1796 It is only necessary to place beside this passage the nervous, keen, stirring challenge of another extract in order to distinguish the woman's hand from the man's :

" Men of all parties, now is the time to recognize that you have but one purpose ; beware of exasperating the tutelary genius of France, which since the 9th Thermidor has snatched her from so many perils ; yield to the force of events, whatever be your opinions and your traditions, and rally to a government which offers you peace and liberty and which cannot crumble without burying you in its ruins ! "

And again, in pure, unadulterated Constantine phraseology :

" The Republic is an end, the Revolution was a way ; it is time to turn our regards from this way in order to see at length where we have arrived."

The *Memoirs of Barras*[1] contain an amusing but characteristic account of how, when he was a Director, the Ambassadress brought Benjamin to present the pamphlet to him :

" It was the maiden effort, the political début, of a young publicist who has since shed much lustre on his name. . . . I am not going to say which of the two led the other, which was the man and which the woman, for . . . I here declare that I never really knew to which sex Mme. de Staël belonged. . . . Holding M. Benjamin Constant by the hand (she said to me), ' Here is a young man who is prodigiously witty and who belongs to us ; he is devoting himself to the good cause ; he is altogether one of us.' The protégé of Mme. de Staël was a tall, affected and foolish-looking youth. . . . Fiery red hair . . . small eyes which one would have believed to have been of the same colour had not the spectacles sheltering them prevented them from being seen ; a delicate, ironical mouth, seeming to make game of everything, even its owner ; . . . such was M. Benjamin Constant at the age of twenty.

" I thanked Mme. de Staël, and waited for the youthful neophyte to say something in his turn, when he remarked to me, with a most embarrassed air, while twisting his body into all kinds of contortions, ' Citizen Director, it would make me very happy if the short treatise I take the liberty of offering you would afford you pleasure.' This sentence was spoken with a thickness of utterance and an effeminate stammering which could only pronounce *s* as if it were *z*. I have since learned that M. Benjamin Constant's pronunciation has

[1] The authenticity of these Memoirs, which were printed posthumously by his secretary, is doubtful, but Duruy pronounces them genuine, although somewhat tampered with by the secretary.

improved. France and Europe are acquainted with his progress 1796
and his achievements in the Tribune."

The picture is so delightful that it is a pity to have to discredit it, but unfortunately the error in Benjamin's age is not the only inaccuracy it contains; Mme. de Staël was, as we have seen, in Switzerland throughout the year of 1796, and *De la Force du Gouvernment*, the pamphlet answering to Barras' description, appeared in the spring. Possibly it has been confused with the *Réactions Politiques* of the following year. At all events, Benjamin seems to have been satisfied with the reception of his pamphlet, and counted Barras henceforth as his patron.

But while strengthening his union with the Directoire, *De la Force du Gouvernment* subjected him to the most bitter attacks from enemies in both camps. On the 5th of June, the *Feuille du Jour* asked:

"What is M. Benjamin Constant doing here? He is a foreigner; why doesn't he comply with the law requiring all foreigners to leave Paris? He has come from Switzerland full of conceit and ambition. He might have seen from the cool reception he received in Paris, from the mortifying *incognito* which he is preserving here, in spite of his little intrigues, that, like the Roman shoemaker who taught his parrot to sing 'Long live the Emperor,' he had only defiled the altar. What an excellent thing it would be if Carnot would show this little Swiss to the door, who abuses the rash hospitality which we have been good enough to offer him, and send him back to bury his shame and remorse in his own country, with a sign on his back, 'Useless trash.'"

If there was one subject on which Benjamin was particularly sensitive, it was his nationality, and his enemies were never weary of attacking him in this tender spot. He made no delay in demanding reparation of the author, Bertin de Veaux (the future director of the *Journal des Débats*), and they met a few days later in the Bois de Boulogne. Like most of his duels, it ended in a reconciliation, which grew into a friendship, and Bertin retracted his uncomplimentary observations in his paper. But the sensational rumours were wafted to Geneva, for the Paris papers did not fail to make the most of it, and there was a commotion among his feminine admirers. Rosalie was alarmed and indignant; Mme. de Staël was in hysterics, and dispatched a messenger from Coppet to scour the town for stray copies of the journals. "Heavens!" wrote Rosalie to Charles, who was then in Paris. "On what a

1796 frightful arena his friend has precipitated him! . . . It is cruel to find his name on these lips and in this fashion!" Mme. de Staël was a very excitable lady, and Benjamin was very precious. She wrote a feverish note to Rosalie, depicting her agitation with characteristic hyperbole:

"In spite of the stupid impertinence of this paper, it seems to me impossible that Benjamin will stoop to fight with all these journalists. . . . Nevertheless, knowing his impulsiveness, I am in torture. What does Charles say? In God's name, what does he say? . . . Tell me to the least syllable. Do not dare to go to bed without getting your letters and writing me what they contain. I have the right to request this of you. For twenty-eight hours I have trembled and wept and perished with anxiety. If you knew what he is to me; what a letter, too, I have received from him, what an angel of tenderness he is to me! Upon him depends all that life holds for me. In Heaven's name, hide nothing from me! If he were wounded! But no! He will not fight. It would be absurd, almost degrading for such a man as he."

It would be interesting to know Rosalie's emotions on reading these ravings about her "angel" cousin, for she was a shrewd, matter-of-fact little spinster and no lover of the *Trop Célèbre* as she called Mme. de Staël, and was also well aware upon how many other men the happiness of that lady's life already had depended.

But as soon as the sensation of the duel had blown over, Rosalie's assistance was required, for Benjamin, exasperated by the repeated reminders that he was a foreigner on French soil, determined to look up his Huguenot ancestors. Even the friendly *Moniteur* had commented on the remarkable understanding and interest, *for a foreigner*, that he had shown in discussing "our country." He proposed to settle that matter for ever by claiming French citizenship, as his father had already done, under the law of 1790. This law restored the rights of citizenship to all descendants of Frenchmen, if they returned and took the civil oath.[1] In order to obtain the required proofs of his French descent, he made a surreptitious journey to Switzerland, and wrote Rosalie from Coppet:

"I am in a prodigious embarrassment among our ancestors. Our grandfather Auguste, who, until now had left France to settle in Geneva, has suddenly become *Agostino Costante*, and I have vainly implored him to remain French. He will not desist from becoming cis-Alpine. I bid you to ask my uncle whence this

[1] Juste had availed himself of this law when he moved to Dôle in 1791.

unexpected metamorphosis, which all the Geneva registers from 1560 to 1610 repeat. Meanwhile do not mention my researches to any one." 1796

Presumably Rosalie succeeded in repatriating the strayed ancestor, but another obstacle presented itself, a clause in the law, originally aimed at the *émigrés*, which excluded from citizenship those who had been out of France for seven years. Undeterred, however, he prepared a Petition to the Corps Législatif in which he maintained that the clause of 1795 could not take away a right that the law of 1790 had granted. The petition was printed in the *Moniteur* of 1st August by order of the legislature, and having been referred to a committee, was pigeon-holed by an adjournment. The annexation of Geneva a year later put an end to the dispute by making him a citizen, to the relief of all the Constants, who had not relished this dragging of their ancestors through the newspapers. " Benjamin with his petitions to prove he is a Frenchman will get me condemned for one in England," wrote Charles, who had an important lawsuit to be tried in England.

The agitations of this contest, together with the absence of Mme. de Staël, had cooled Benjamin's enthusiasm for Paris that summer. He found the city dull, notwithstanding the éclat his political articles had brought him. " A rising Republic is a superb thing, considered in its results, but it is best not to observe it through a microscope," he wrote his aunt. Charles, who saw him in Paris in June, was scandalized at the company he kept, and at the opinions and deportment of the " famous performers "—minions of the Directoire, such as Bergon, Riouffe, Jullian, Méchin and Allard—who met in Benjamin's rooms for breakfast.

" Noisy gaiety, the most libertine conversation, the least temperate expressions, furnished the theme of the talk. Benjamin, seeing my astonishment, could not help saying to me, ' Would you believe that this sort of thing is in the antechamber of the Government of to-day ? ' . . . He looked played-out, bored ; he has had his hair cut *au Brutus* but he resembles the sun in the month of December more than a Roman in the days of the Republic." (To Rosalie, June 16, 1796.)

Constant's relatives regarded his new *liaison* and the political affiliations into which it had brought him with as little favour as Mme. de Charrière. Mme. de Staël's manners and morals and her eagerness to meddle and intrigue in politics, did not please her compatriots, and the Constants did not conceal their dis-

1798 approbation of this intimacy. Juste when he came to Switzerland obstinately avoided meeting her, although she sought to see him;[1] Samuel disliked her, and Mme. de Nassau worried Benjamin by ceasing to write him, and by her coldness and constraint when they met. She was not easily cajoled, and was unmelted by his assurances of the admiration entertained for her by "a person whom I love," and her displeasure continued almost to the end of his connection with Mme. de Staël.[2] In September 1798 he wrote from his country place at Hérivaux:

"I ask you how and why you have withdrawn from me a friendship to which I attach such high value. I flatter myself that you will not refuse to a nephew whom you saw born, to a man whom you have loved, to the son of your sister, Henriette de Chandieu, the explanation he requests and which is necessary to his peace." (9 Vendémiaire, An VI.)

As for Rosalie, her disgust at hearing her cousin continually proclaimed by the *Trop Célèbre* as "the man I love best in all the world," might have been overcome had the lady consented to marry him, but she never could bring herself to feel at ease in the society of Coppet.

Benjamin's resolution to transfer his residence and citizenship to France had resulted in an exodus of Samuel's family from La Chablière, which they may have traced remotely to Mme. de Staël's influence. From time to time his nephew's need of funds had made Samuel uneasy lest the low rent which Juste had been satisfied to accept for the property was not sufficient for the more extravagant Benjamin, and in 1792 Charles had urged his father to leave the place, and throw off "this disagreeable state of dependence on Benjamin." After he became intimate with Mme. de Staël rumours reached Rosalie that he wanted La Chablière for her, and this suspicion was strengthened by his sounding her father in the spring of 1795, before leaving for Paris, as to Samuel's

[1] "My uncle Juste happens to be here at the same time as the *Trop Célèbre*, whom he does not adore as much as his son does. She wanted to see him, but he managed to escape her. She had invited herself to supper, and she arrived so late that he was able to have retired." (Rosalie to Charles, March 1798, Geneva Archives.)

[2] In the *Journal Intime* (1804) he spoke of this aunt as a "woman of great intelligence and who is much attached to me, but influenced by the atmosphere which surrounds her. She has adopted all its prejudices, which has established a kind of restraint between us which I can only rise above by dint of pleasantries."

desire to renew the lease, and live so far from town, now that he 1796
was unable to afford horses. Benjamin hinted that he could get a higher rent for it, but, in case his uncle preferred to remain, suggested that he himself would find it a great saving on the cost of lodgings in Lausanne if he might occupy a portion of the house. He suggested a bedroom and sitting-room, looking on the terrace, a servant's room, the common use of the kitchen, and stable room for two horses. Apparently Samuel agreed to this arrangement, and Benjamin sent his books and some other effects to La Chablière. But he could not have used his apartment there, for he seems to have been at Coppet when he returned to Switzerland, and after his purchase of an estate in France he took steps to dispose of his Swiss property. Although it did not find another tenant at once, Samuel moved away from the old home of the Constants in June 1796, and it soon passed out of the Constant family for ever. Rosalie wrote sadly to Charles on the eve of their departure :

" Every day we continue to dismantle this poor La Chablière. Nature revenges herself for what we take away, for never has it been so lovely ; the air is sweet with syringas, the nightingales are close to the house and give us most touching adieux every evening ; we are eating strawberries and the cherry trees are covered with fruit ; we shall hardly see them turn red. I passed last evening under the beautiful chestnut trees which we are leaving."

The parting from La Chablière must have been very painful for them, for all the Constant grandchildren had known and loved it from childhood. It was there that they had been accustomed to visit their grandmother in the summers. Juste Constant had taken great pride in improving and beautifying it, and it was the only portion of his inheritance which, by ceding it to Benjamin, he had saved from the wreck which had followed his military disgrace. Benjamin, too, although he had never stayed there after his grandmother's death, valued and loved the place, more, to be sure, in retrospect (as was his fashion) than in actual possession. In 1824, when it had become the property of Count de Fries, a banker from Vienna, he revisited it with his wife and Rosalie, and as he walked under the " beautiful chestnut trees," which still to-day shade the avenue, mounting the terrace to the long, low, golden-stuccoed house, and followed the romantic path leading to the outlook under the lindens where he used to sit with his grandmother and watch the silver sparkle of the distant lake,

1796 and the violet shadows flitting over the valley of the Juras, he regretted that he ever had parted with this lovely home of his forbears, and determined to repurchase it, if possible, and to make it a retreat for his old age.

Before occupying the apartment near the Cathedral, which they had leased in Lausanne, Rosalie and her father went to pass the summer with their relative, Mme. de Charrière de Bavois (*la bonne tante*, as she always called her) at her cosy little *campagne* at Ouchy. Here it was that Benjamin found them when, early in August, he returned to Switzerland to attend to a lawsuit at Berne. Coppet was his headquarters, as a matter of course. "We never see Benjamin except at his Beauty's side," wrote Rosalie. "He is nothing to us, which is very sad." When "Our Lady of Victories" (another of Rosalie's names for her), talking incessantly of Benjamin and his achievements, descended with her "poultry yard of followers" upon the Bonne Tante's celebrated, but eminently proper and tedious, "Saturdays," she swallowed up everything and everybody, and the sedate little drawing-room became "an arena." It was no longer "society," in Rosalie's opinion.

"It is impossible to live peaceably with these extraordinary people. With enough to make ten fools happy she is perfectly miserable, but she loves Benjamin passionately. God knows where all this will lead them." [1]

The "Coppet Style" did not suit Rosalie, and she confessed to feeling awkward and stiff in the overpowering presence of the Ambassadress. So it was with some reluctance that she consented to pay a visit to her "Cousin de Staël" and her "Cousin le Tondu." [2] She found the lady:

"Between the fox, the kitten [3] and the other one, with an elbow on the chest of one, the other grasped by the head, and the third holding the back of her neck and calling her a 'nice little pussy!' This tableau disgusted me. . . . I quarrelled horribly with them about our country, which they regard as the abode of boredom and emptiness. I said that it required more *esprit* to know how to live in one's country, however uncongenial it might be, and to distinguish oneself by making it useful and interesting,

[1] At the time of the Bertin duel, she wrote Rosalie: "I embrace you as a sister; I would love you as a cousin, but Heaven has not permitted it."

[2] Shorn.

[3] Rosalie's names for two of Mme. de Staël's admirers.

than to criticize and abandon it ; but I did not convince Benjamin. 1796
I came away so as to escape having supper there. . . . He went to Berne yesterday for his father's lawsuit, which is to come up to-morrow. He promised to wear powder. His hair, mussed and rough and tumbling over his eyes, would have scandalized their Excellencies' wigs." (Journal to Charles, August 23, 1796.)

While Rosalie was entirely justified in feeling ruffled at her hosts' witticisms at the expense of her country, it was not to be expected that a woman who preferred the gutters of Paris to the far-famed scenery of Switzerland, or a man who had been taught to regard the government of Their Excellencies of Berne as an outrageous tyranny, should find in the peaceful little community at Lausanne any compensation for the big life and tense interests they had known in Paris. Then, as to-day, Paris was the heart of things, and every one was eager to be where the real life of the Revolution was going on.[1] The spectral beauty of Mt. Blanc and the magic green of Lake Léman were lost upon enthusiasts who had seen the vision of a new and free world, and the mild amenities of Vaudois society cramped souls which burned to help in saving a nation from anarchy. Even without the contrast of a Revolution raging on their borders, the atmosphere of this " school of *esprit*, taste and manners " (as a local paper had characterized Lausanne) must have been stifling and monotonous to such complicated and effervescent temperaments as these two amazing friends possessed. Even Rosalie confessed that she dwelt in a " town of celibates . . . with something in its atmosphere which keeps Hymen at a distance " ; where, because there was " less initiative in life, but also less care and duty . . . Death comes very gently and causes less regret." " They have no such troubles in Paris," cried Mme. de Staël, exasperated by the petty scandal on which they fed her : " All that comes from the emptiness of their lives. Here's to Emotion ! "

But if it came to a choice between Lausanne and Geneva, Mme. de Staël would have agreed with Voltaire. Both she and Benjamin held the " Pettissime, parvulissime, et pedantissime république " in special abhorrence. She did not even take the trouble to be impertinent there—arrived at large assemblies three hours late, spoke only to her escort, and left disdainfully without even entering the salon. The self-satisfied complacency of the

[1] " I hold all Switzerland in a magnificent abhorrence. The high mountains affect me like the bars of a convent, shutting us off from the rest of the world." (Kohler, p. 38.)

1796 Genevese irritated her. She said that while in Lausanne they greeted her with, " Ah ! here you are ! We are very glad to see you ! "—in Geneva they said, " You are very happy to return to us, we knew you would be ! " Huber's opinion of Vaudois society is probably just, and was also Benjamin's :

" In the whole social tone of these people good and bad are mingled. Bad is the superficiality, the changing from one thing to another, the reduction of all ideas and feeling into material for shallow conversation. Good is the politeness and ease, the tolerance, the cultivation, the occupation in so many affairs. In short, it is ten times better than the social atmosphere in Germany, but it needs some secret talisman for a good head not to be perverted in this atmosphere. Constant feels this strongly himself, and tries his best to resist it." (To Thérèse Huber, 1795.)

Presumably the descent of Mme. de Staël and her " poultry-yard " upon their social gatherings furnished much of the " material for shallow conversation," even in a period when society viewed with indulgence relations which were, to say the least, unconventional. Particularly were they concerned with her intentions respecting Benjamin, for he belonged to them, in a way, and was connected with most of the " first families " of Vaud. His arrival at Coppet, within a few days after that of Baron de Staël, who had just received his recall to Sweden, caused a sensation in the community. It was rumoured that there was to be a divorce, followed by a marriage to Benjamin.[1] The rumour reached Mme. de Charrière at Colombier, and Montesquiou in Paris, and it was suggested that this affair would furnish a pretty supplement to the chapter on Love in Mme. de Staël's treatise on *Les Passions.* Necker was said to be opposed to the divorce. But gossip had to undergo a revision when, after several months at Coppet, Baron de Staël suddenly departed for Zurich, *en route* for the baths at Aix, taking his wife with him. Meanwhile Benjamin had returned to Paris early in October, bearing a specimen copy of her *Influence des Passions,* on which they had placed their hopes as a means of reconciling the Directoire and securing the coveted permission for her to re-enter France. On the 19th he sent some extracts to Louvet, asking him to print them in the *Sentinelle.* " We should seek to bind the author to us," he wrote, " for such fame and talent

[1] " They are beginning to say in Paris that we shall no more see Mme. de Staël, but Mme. Constant. But if I saw it, I would not believe it." (Montesquiou to Mme. de Montolieu, October 23, 1796. Quoted Kohler, p. 228.)

would have influence, and the number of Republican authors is 1797
small." But Louvet did not greet the recruit warmly, and the extracts were not printed, although they did appear among the Miscellanies in the *Moniteur*.

Although no formal permission to return was forthcoming, there were indications that the Government was ready to allow her presence in France to pass unnoticed, and the joy of the prisoner of Coppet was inexpressible, when, one December day, Benjamin suddenly and secretly appeared and spirited her away, crossing the French border with her on Christmas Day with an old passport of the Year IV.[1] Prudence and semi-official warnings kept her out of Paris, and hence 1797 finds her established near if not actually with Benjamin at his country place, Hérivaux. Here she passed the spring, " in a calm and profound solitude," a little bored to be sure, for, after all, Paris and its salons and theatres still eluded her, but cheered by the society of Mathieu de Montmorency, whose château, Ormesson, was not far away. She made an attempt to have her oldest child, Auguste, join her here, but was strongly opposed by Necker, who feared the displeasure of Baron de Staël. " I think your cousin is very badly off at Hérivaux," he wrote a niece. " The place is a little too remote. I think the neighbourhood does not relish this succession of two Protestants to the Ecclesiastics.[2] Finally, I detest this *à part*, but where would it not be ? "

In all probability Benjamin had already discovered that he detested it too, and that his chariot wheels were hopelessly clogged by the chains which bound him to this impetuous, imprudent and irresistible woman, whose enemies accused her of plotting against the Government that he was so desirous of serving, and whose friends admitted that she wanted to make all men her satellites. But Benjamin was afflicted with a very tender heart, and he could not forget that he owed to her his introduction to the very stage from which she was now excluded ; so he chafed in secret, and no one who saw him zealously advertising her books, and waiting in the antechambers of those who controlled her destiny, dreamed that already he was thirsting for his freedom.

[1] Montmorency recounted to Montesquiou " the audacious undertaking, the resistance, the conditional consent," in an unedited letter of 2nd December 1796, cited by Kohler. One wonders to which of the pair it applies.

[2] Hérivaux was Church property, confiscated by the Revolution.

CHAPTER X

THE DIRECTOIRE AND THE CONSULATE

(1797–1801)

1797 CONSTANT has said that his political education was received in the salons. In the days of his novitiate the evidences of feminine supervision were apparent, and it is conceivable that, recognizing this himself, he often both looked and felt "foolish," as Barras said, when in tow of his terrible friend. While allowing Mme. de Staël full credit for all that her enthusiasm and her sincerity, her big-heartedness and her splendid mentality, had done for him, and for the wide experience he had gained in the varied circle of her friends, it is plain that, had she kept herself more in the background, she might have been a much more valuable ally. But Mme. de Staël in the background is unthinkable; certainly Benjamin was the last person to be able to put her there. Consequently her incessant praise of him and her determination to drag or push him into every position or relation which might be advantageous, and—what was worse—to make use of him at every opportunity to assist herself—all this not only exposed them both to ridicule, but detracted from his manliness and actually injured his standing with those he most desired to win. It is useless to deny that the young man was openly ambitious and decidedly vain; which, after all, is not dishonourable. He had come to France in 1795, conscious of talents as yet undeveloped, and eager to identify himself with the establishment of principles in which he had a deep and sincere interest. But he had to nurse his loyalty to an ungrateful Government through two *Coups d'Etat*, those of the 18th Fructidor and of the 18th Brumaire, and to experience two electoral defeats, before he succeeded in entering the legislative body.

Meanwhile he neglected no avenues to favour. In order to "arrive" it was advisable to appear at the receptions held by the

Directoire at the Luxembourg.[1] A chronicler of Parisian affairs 1797
who saw him there, "seeking to console himself for the indifference of the electoral bodies," speaks thus of him :

"One of the men who play a prominent part in the new Republicanism is a Swiss named Benjamin Constant, who was, they say, secretary to the Duke of Brunswick at the time of his entry into France, and who drew up his incendiary proclamation.[2] This Benjamin has been hesitating a long time before declaring himself. From the 9th Thermidor to the 13th Vendémiaire he held a very shrewd position in order that he might be able to cry, according to events, *Long live the King*, or *Long live the Directoire*! The victory of Vendémiaire decided him ; he produced many strongly Republican writings, flattering himself that the suffrage would favour him ; but as it is not the writers of pamphlets that win favour in these days, he wasted his efforts. . . . Excepting his talent for intrigue, which this Swiss possesses enormously, and in which the Baroness de Staël gives him daily lessons, he has, as a political writer, considerable merit ; his style is concise, vigorous, but sometimes a little obscure." [3]

Another avenue to political success which Benjamin followed was that of the Clubs. The Directoire, which had at first frowned on private meetings for the discussion of politics, decided, in the summer of 1797, to revive the popular clubs, in order to check the growing influence of the Royalists, and as an offset to their Club de Clichy. The Cercle Constitutionnel was therefore founded, with the avowed object of admitting to its membership only men who were "irreproachable and enlightened." Many members of the Five Hundred and of the Anciens belonged to it, and the opening address by Riouffe, on 14th July, was a veritable challenge to the enemies of the Directoire. Talleyrand, who had lately returned from America and needed to form new political alliances, was prominent in the Club, and Sièyes, the future sponsor of the Consulate, is said to have belonged ; Mme. de Staël, of course, was an active member, and consequently Benjamin also. Of his connection with its origin Benjamin had given the following account, in a letter to his uncle :

[1] Mme. de Chastenay (*Mém.*) speaks of meeting him at these receptions, where "his spectacles were as famous as his red hair ; often alone and always with his satirical, mocking manner, whether observing or talking."

[2] See note, Chapter VI. p. 2.

[3] Letter from a Parisian on the situation of the Government. June 17, 1797. (Quoted in Glachant.)

1797 "You have no doubt seen in the papers much misrepresented details of a Club which originated at a dinner given by me, and which is now composed of more than six hundred members, among whom is all that is estimable and distinguished in the Republican party. The Government greatly encourages this assembly, and it has already served to stir up public opinion." (To Sam. de Constant, July 11, 1797.)

He was made Secretary of the Club, a position of greater importance than that of President, but it was not until after the reorganization, which took place after the 18th Fructidor, that his most famous speeches were made.

The Cercle Constitutionnel, or Salm Club, as it was also called from the Hôtel de Salm in the rue de Lille, which was for a long time its meeting-place,[1] was of course strong in its support of the Directoire. The Ministry of July was its work—Talleyrand, Lenoir-Laroche and François de Neufchâteau all being members; and the Coup d'Etât of the 18th Fructidor was assisted, if not actually originated, by this Club. Mallet du Pan, who detested its politics, named Constant and Mme. de Staël as forming, with Barras, the "Triumvir" who pushed it through. In course of time many offshoots of the Cercle Constitutionnel were established in the Departments, which became strongholds of Jacobinism, and the Government, alarmed by the boldness of their speeches, caused all the so-called Constitutional Clubs to be closed. The Salm Club, however, reorganized and reopened in February 1798, in the Palais Royal, or Égalité, whence it continued to endorse the methods of the Directoire, and to send its discourses to be printed in the *Moniteur*.

The objects of this Club were furthered by the publication of pamphlets. It is unfortunate that this means of gaining an independent hearing has fallen into disuse, for newspapers are fully as cautious nowadays of offending their patrons, as, in Benjamin's day, they were subservient to their party, and the pamphlet might well have a place in modern political education. Benjamin's talents were well adapted to this kind of propaganda, and already, in May, he had published *Des Réactions Politiques*, which had a very large sale and which Mme. de Staël everywhere proclaimed to be the finest book that had appeared in French. The *Moniteur* of May 15 contained a long review of it by Jourdain, who praised it as possessing "all the talent, fearlessness and forcible logic which the author displayed in his *Force du Gouvernment*." It

[1] Afterwards at 932 rue de l'Université.

was, in fact, a more mature and extended treatment of that earlier pamphlet. He soon brought out a second edition, preceded by a shorter treatise, *Les Effets de la Terreur*.[1] Together they formed a stirring appeal to those Jacobins who had been seduced into joining forces with the Royalists disguised as Moderates, urging them to avoid the use of revenge and force, since in the end they would themselves be crushed by the very weapons they used. The shorter treatise was a reply to an article by Lezay claiming that without the Terror and the Terrorists the Republic could not have succeeded. This was denied by Constant. 1797

" The Terror was not necessary to the safety of the Republic ; the Republic was saved in spite of the Terror . . . (and the) Terror created most of the evils to which its overthrow is not attributed. . . . The Republic must not be confounded with the Terror, the Republicans with the executioners. . . . Since you wish to have a Republic in the end, do not dishonour those who founded it, nor proscribe those who are defending it."

Indulgence for the men, however, even while abhorring their crimes and ambition, was urged with a tolerance characteristic of Benjamin. Already he manifested that breadth of view and flexibility in adapting the means to the end, which throughout his life laid him open to the charge of inconsistency from those who, pledged to " my party, right or wrong," could not see the unchangeable principles toward which, with all his mistakes of judgment, he never ceased to work. A wit has said that in order to keep one's principles, it is necessary to change one's party frequently. To-day we would call Constant's methods Opportunism ; then he was accused of Machiavellism.

" Between individuals and individuals the Government should put a force which is repressive ; between individuals and institutions, a force which is conservative ; between individuals and opinions, no force whatever.

" When you have established an institution, do not be troubled because it is not approved. Do not seek to prevent people from denouncing it ; do not demand any submission except that which is formal and legal. Ignore the opposition, assume the obedience ; maintain the institution ; with law, forms and time the institution will triumph.

" When you have, I will not say, established an opinion—God preserve you from establishing one !—but rather, overthrown

[1] Reprinted in *Mélanges de Litt. et de Pol.* (1829) in abridged form, and under the title, *Des Effets de la Rigueur qu'on nomme Révolutionnaire.*

1797 the power of some opinion which was once dogma, do not be alarmed if people regret it; do not prohibit the expression of these regrets; do not pay to it the honour of intolerance; oppose to its importance your forgetfulness; leave to who will, the duty of combating it; . . . compel only the actions, and soon the opinions will suffer the fate of all opinions which persecution has not ennobled, and will descend for ever from its dignity of dogma."

But, on the other hand, he attacked that licence of opinion in the press which descends to calumny and persecution, and which is, after all, but the instrument of tyranny. He closed with a rhetorical flourish which might have served for the oration of a Brutus over the ashes of Despotism.

"All you who, for a day, for an hour, had faith in the Revolution, you who endorsed or applauded or profaned—Constituents, Législatifs, Conventionnels, Feuillants, Jacobins—malefactors by participation, or criminals by non-interference, you are struck down by the same anathema. The fate of every one of you is sealed. To you who were guilty, under the Republic, life—she has promised it; under Royalty, death. To you who were only ambitious, under the Republic, pardon—she owes it to you, for, in spite of your mistakes, you have served Liberty; under Royalty, death. To you whose ever upright conduct offends none but the tyrant, under the Republic, glory; under Royalty, death."

The sentiments of the first of these extracts reappear in all his political writings; the theatrical "Coppet style," in which the second is couched, was gradually abandoned for the biting irony, the keen, concise, lucid, yet graceful simplicity for which he became famous. In reading the clear and consistent statements of his political creed it is difficult to comprehend how he could have been so misunderstood and misrepresented, until we remember that the heat of party feeling breeds abuse and assertion, rather than discrimination and fairness. The man who wrote, "Between a Constitutional Monarchy and a Republic, the difference is one of form; between a Constitutional and an Absolute Monarchy, the difference is fundamental,"[1] had no need to apologize for his acceptance of the *Cent Jours*, and of the Bourbon Restoration; neither could slavish adherence to a party slogan be expected from the author of these sentiments:

"When you say 'The Constitution,' you are right; 'The whole Constitution,' you are still right. But when you add, 'Nothing but the Constitution,' you have added an absurdity.

[1] Preface to edition of 1819.

'The Constitution, All the Constitution, and All which is necessary 1797
to make the Constitution work,'—that is the only sensible thing to say."[1]

The second edition of *Réactions Politiques* was speedily exhausted. But if Constant flattered himself that it had strengthened his position with the Directoire, he had no encouragement to think that he had converted his adversaries. Royalists and Terrorists alike attacked him furiously, and the scores on both sides were heaped up against a day of reckoning. As for the Government he endorsed, it appreciated his support, but was slow to bestow rewards.

Nor did individuals prove more grateful than Republics. Among Mme. de Staël's old friends was one who was deeply indebted to her, and from whom she might reasonably expect some return of favours. It was through her good offices that Talleyrand (who had discarded his inconvenient title of Bishop of Autun, in the early days of the Revolution, in order to play a ministerial and political rôle for which he was better adapted), after languishing in exile for several years, had been permitted to return to France when a more tolerant regime seemed to promise him not only forgiveness, but a field for his peculiar talents. The judgment of posterity upon this prince of cynics may or may not agree in consigning him to the "dung-heap" which Barras said he would have perfumed.[2] But Mme. de Staël came under the spell of his fascinations before his unblushing egotism and effrontery had manifested itself conspicuously. She eagerly introduced him in her salon and in the Constitutional Club as a "friend of Liberty," and he in turn was entirely willing to be a friend of any cause or leader that promised to give him a lift. But to be both poor and unimportant was a severe affliction to him, and one day, when he had only twenty-five louis left, he threatened to blow out his brains unless she could find him a "suitable position." The Memoirs of Barras relates how, by dint of tears and *esprit*, Mme. de Staël prevailed upon him to give the portfolio of Foreign Affairs to the ex-Bishop of Autun; but in all probability Barras believed his Council would be strengthened by the presence of this shrewd diplomat, who possessed the valuable gift of being able to "see at night what the whole world was going to want the next day." But what more natural than that Benjamin, who had also con-

[1] Ed. Laboulaye. Chapter IX. p. 124.

[2] "A mass of physical and moral corruption" (Miss Berry's *Journal*, 1816).

1797 tributed his efforts to get the appointment for Talleyrand, dragging him out of bed every morning at six, and spurring him on to necessary exertions with influential people, should look for some return for his interest ?

So, at all events, the Memoirs of Barras sneeringly imply : " At this time the young Benjamin Constant, with all his readiness of grasp, had not yet acquired the knowledge of worldly methods. . . . He believed in the truth of words, in the reality of sentiments, in the chivalry of opinions and, to a certain extent, in the union of interests." And, as if to encourage him in this naïve faith, Barras entrusted to him the pleasant duty of informing Talleyrand, " who was beguiling the weariness of waiting, at the theatre," of his appointment upon the Council. Benjamin is represented as having told Barras afterwards that the new Foreign Secretary, during their rapid drive to the Luxembourg to thank his patron, kept striking his companion's knee as he sat beside him, and exclaiming, " We are in possession of the stronghold ; we must make an immense fortune out of it, an immense fortune ! " " And he kept his word," Benjamin is quoted as saying, when relating the episode—" at least as far as regards himself."

Meanwhile the Constants in Lausanne were expecting some brilliant appointment for their relative in reward for his zeal for the Directoire. Some expression of these expectations on the part of Samuel called forth the following from Benjamin :

" The new Ministers are my friends because their principles are mine, but I have accepted no place, and I have no more wish to share their destinies than their perils, if there are any. A rather curious combination of circumstances has caused the belief that I contributed to the nomination of this new ministry in the Club which I founded, and especially that I worked to put out some of the former Ministers. This supposition alone would prevent me from accepting any position." (August 9, 1797.)

Nevertheless, it is possible that his scruples might have been overcome. Talleyrand, at first mindful of his obligations, wrote to Bonaparte that, next to Sièyes, Constant was the best man to perfect the organization of the new Cis-Alpine Republic.

" He is a man about your age, a zealous champion of freedom, and his talents are of the first rank. He has published some little treatises which are written in a forcible and brilliant style, rich in fine and subtle observations. His character is firm and moderate, his views unhesitatingly Republican and liberal."

In truth, later developments show that Benjamin might easily 1797
have proved the rival of Sièyes as a maker of Constitutions, but the recall of Bonaparte to France put an end to this project. Another opportunity presented itself nearer home. Mallet du Pan relates that it was rumoured that Talleyrand had dismissed Giraudet, the Secretary of the Foreign Office, "in order to put in this important position a stranger, a young Swiss, named Constant, who has become known through some Revolutionist pamphlets, who is consumed by a desire to instruct all Europe, possessing education and talents, but the most perverse man under thirty to be found, and the most deadly enemy of the Government of Berne, under which he was born." There is also in existence a note to Constant from François de Neufchâteau, who had been appointed to the Foreign Office at the same time with Talleyrand, expressing the hope that Constant would "soon be one of us," which indicates that the secretarial appointment was more than a mere rumour. But whether Talleyrand was afraid that the young Swiss would outstrip him, as Barras believed ("He would have liked not only to snuff him out but to bury him alive"), or whether Barras' colleagues doubted the disinterestedness of the Swiss character and especially opposed the honouring of another of Mme. de Staël's protégés, or whether Benjamin himself feared to be too closely identified with a Government whose existence was just then seriously menaced—it is certain that the end of the summer found him still playing "handy man" to the Directoire and to Mme. de Staël, and that Talleyrand lost no time in completely forgetting both of his benefactors.

Meanwhile it had become necessary for the Directoire to take strong measures, if the Government was to survive the plottings of the Royalists and the accessions to the Moderate or Constitutional party in the legislative bodies, as a result of the recent elections. Barras determined to rid himself of his two troublesome colleagues, Carnot and Barthélémy, and to replace them by two insignificant men, concentrating the authority in the hands of himself, Rewbell and Larevellière. Not only the people, but many sincere and intelligent friends of the Republic, alarmed by the rumours of Royalist conspiracies and a Bourbon Restoration, believed these desperate measures justified. Benjamin, although quite aware of the proposed Coup d'Etat of the 18th Fructidor, and approving it, took no active part, but Mme. de Staël, although she afterwards disclaimed having even favoured it, was accused by many people of having deliberately assisted it, and of course

1797 Benjamin came in for a share of the charge.[1] At Hérivaux, where she had passed part of the summer, and in her salon in Paris, where she continued to receive " Jacobins in the morning, *émigrés* in the evening, and everybody at dinner," Mme. de Staël's eloquence had unlimited opportunity to demonstrate to Benjamin and to her guests the danger to the Government that lurked in Royalist conspiracies and Catholic propaganda. Barras found her an admirable tool, and through her, Benjamin. Thibaudeau relates how Benjamin moved about among her guests loftily assuring them that there was no longer any chance of a reconciliation between the two parties in the Council, that the Directoire had gone too far to retreat, that the next election would be more hostile to it than the last, and that the Directors must be left free to rally public opinion. At a *petit dîner à trois*, when Thibaudeau was the third, they both, he says, attempted unsuccessfully to win him over to the side of the Directoire, painting to him in blackest colours the imminent return of the Bourbons, and its probable consequences. On that famous night of the 4th of September, while the Constitutional party was falling apart and disappearing in the panic caused by the advance of General Augereau on the Tuilleries to arrest the so-called " Royalist " deputies, while Carnot was fleeing through the Luxembourg gardens, and Barthélémy was being dragged from his bed to prison in the Temple, Mme. de Staël and Constant were noted among the crowd of citizens, deputies, soldiers and generals who filled the apartments of Barras in the Luxembourg, awaiting news of the triumph of the Government. Meanwhile the terrified members of the Corps Législatif sat surrounded by soldiers and by a howling mob of the people, such as always sprang up as by magic whenever there was trouble in the air, and drew up the laws which their masters dictated, annulling the recent elections, transporting half a hundred accused persons, reaffirming the laws against *émigrés* and priests, and placing the press under censorship for one year ; violating, in short, every one of the laws of personal and popular rights for whose recognition Benjamin argued and fought all his life. Unwittingly he had assisted, or at least endorsed, an act of despotism whose cruel consequences for all suspected opponents of the Directoire must have horrified him.

[1] Mme. de la Tour du Pin (*Mémoires*) voices the common belief, namely, that Benjamin influenced Mme. de Staël to favour the Coup d'Etat. Everything that lady did, which was not approved by her friends, was laid at Benjamin's door.

Yet so blinded had he been by the plausible excuse of the necessity 1797
of drastic measures to the preservation of the Republic, that it was a long time before he, or Mme. de Staël either, admitted that the 18th Fructidor had retarded rather than established the cause of Liberty. On the 30th Fructidor he defended the Coup d'Etat in an address at the Salm Club, on the occasion of the planting of a Tree of Liberty, saying :

" Some individual misfortunes were regrettable, but nevertheless necessary. . . . [It is not the case] of three men subduing seven hundred, nor an armed force subjugating the representatives of the nation, but of patriotism dispersing the revolutionary factions of the Councils."

Mme. de Staël later disavowed her own participation in this act of tyranny, but in an unfinished manuscript of hers, written fully a year afterwards—*Des Circonstances qui peuvent terminer la Révolution*[1]—in which M. Paul Gautier believes he finds evidences of the collaboration of Constant—she defends the 18th Fructidor as equivalent to the English right to dissolve Parliament, and justifies its illegal accomplishment in the absence of the legal right to do it. In 1830 Constant openly repudiated this view in the *Révue de Paris*, tracing to the 18th Fructidor the evils of militarism that had made possible the 18th Brumaire. While the most enlightened friends of the Republic, he said, seeing it threatened by an active and powerful party, thought that the Constitution could be saved by a Coup d'Etat, that is, by a violation of that very Constitution, this idea was an " error, in credit with Governments of short sight and of perverse intentions, and repeated by servile or stupid writers."

Judging by the insignificance of the reward he received for his loyalty, the importance of the aid he rendered to the Directoire in this crisis must have been exaggerated by his enemies. The Presidency of the canton of Luzarches—where his property, Hérivaux, was situated—whose elections had been annulled on the 19th Fructidor, and its hostile officials replaced by friends of the Government—seems a paltry price to pay for any active co-operation in the dark deeds of the 18th Fructidor. But he apparently accepted it in a spirit of loyalty and earnestness. At his installation, on the 23rd Brumaire, he addressed the inhabitants of Luzarches, many of whom were, like himself, purchasers of

[1] After slumbering for years in Mme. Récamier's desk, this MS. finally passed to the Bibliothèque Nationale, and was published in 1906.

1797 national property seized from the Royalists and from the Church, and referred to the 18th Fructidor as the "immortal day" which had assured to them the peaceful possession of their property.

"Cultivate your fields, occupy these rectories to which your right was challenged, and remember that the whole nation stands back of you to insure the rights which her good faith guarantees to you. . . . Citizens, in the interest of each, as well as those of all, swear with me, let this oath be for ever the rule of your conduct, 'Hatred to Royalty and anarchy, devotion and fidelity to the Constitution of the Year III., and to the Republic.'"

Notwithstanding her share in the events just narrated, the prevailing distrust of Royalists included Mme. de Staël, whose relations with the *émigrés* were so well known, and still continued. After giving birth to a daughter[1] in June, she had lost no time in returning to public life, and the discovery of some letters she had written to warn some of her *émigré* friends of the intended blow at the Royalists had again compromised her with the police. Benjamin addressed a letter to the Directoire in her behalf, in which the sentiment and style were unmistakably hers.

"I owe it to friendship, I owe it to justice, a still more sacred thing, lastly, I owe it perhaps to the Commonwealth, which I have served with all my strength, and which I hope to serve again, respectfully to address the Directoire in behalf of a person infamously calumniated, etc."

Incidentally he took occasion himself to emerge from that same shadow which had eclipsed his friend, and called upon Barras, with whom he had "shared the perils of the 18th Fructidor," and upon the deputies who had assisted the Directoire on that memorable day, who saw him lending to the success of their enterprise all his strength and zeal; and upon General Hoche,[2] with whom he, Benjamin, and two others, had "sworn to die for the Government or to assist in crushing the conspirators to earth"; and upon

[1] Albertine, afterwards Duchesse de Broglie, born June 8. "Mme. de Staël has at last been delivered of a daughter, and she was never for a moment without a dozen people in her room. I saw her this afternoon; she was in bed, but talked, discoursed, as usual. Truly she is not like any other woman. I think you need not have any uneasiness about the baby; there is never any lack of people to give all those attentions, and in case of need, as you say, Mathieu would take Mme. Necker's place excellently; moreover, his mother intended him for a *berceuse*." (Montesquiou to Mme. de Montolieu. June 11. Kohler.)

[2] Hoche and Chérin were generals of the Directoire who assisted in the Coup d'Etat.

General Chérin,[1] who had witnessed his "ardour and devotion" 1798
on all occasions—all of whom, together with the pages he wrote "when Carnot was President," could testify to his unswerving devotion to the Government. If this letter, quoted in Barras' Memoirs, be genuine, it proves that on this occasion at least Benjamin's political instinct had led him astray.

But all this rhetoric was wasted, certainly so far as Mme. de Staël was concerned, and the new year (1798) saw her turning her face toward Coppet. "May she never come back nor Benjamin either," wrote Montesquiou to Mme. de Montolieu in Switzerland: "Your country is the only one where this couple is not a public calamity." Her departure was hailed with a chorus of abuse from the scurrilous Jacobin newspapers; "Lugete, Veneres, cupidinesque! The baroness of baronesses, the pride of her sex, the pearl among women, the goddess of oligarchies, the darling of the god of *Constancy*, . . . the protectress of *émigrés*, the universal woman—has at last left France!"[2]

Left alone once more, Benjamin devoted his attention to his new office of President of Luzarches, and to cultivating a taste for domesticity on his estate of Hérivaux. This property, which he had purchased in November 1796, for 50,000 francs, had formerly been a dependency of the abbey of Hérivaux, and was sold as national property five years before he acquired it.[3] It consisted of the convent, offices, a church, and two hundred and twenty acres of land, laid out in courtyard, gardens, field, vineyards and woods. As the building was entirely too large for his needs, he tore down two-thirds of it, retaining only one wing for his residence, the interior of which remained almost exactly as it had been before the Revolution. The surrounding country is somewhat bleak, but the house stood in the midst of prettily wooded hills. Here he had sheltered Mme. de Staël in the spring of 1797, here he wrote *Les Effets de la Terreur* and *Réactions Politiques*, and here on the strength of "some hens, cows, pigs, a park, some woods and a river," he set up as a country gentleman and entered into local politics. It is amusing to picture the bored and cynical Benjamin, with his tall, stooping figure, his red curls—or were they golden?—and his

[1] See note 2 on previous page.

[2] The *Journal des Hommes Libres* speaks of him as the "son of a Prussian Swiss Baron, one of the most powerful Paladins of the Noblesse."

[3] In the deed of purchase, Constant is described as a "Swiss, living at 296 rue de la Loi, Paris."

1798 spectacles, trying to initiate the inhabitants of Luzarches into the *Culte Décadaire* (one of the pet institutions of the Directoire), and conducting the perfunctory ceremonies of the Décade [1] feasts with all their theatrical processions and tawdry symbolism—the Feast of the Sovereignty of the People, the Feast of Married Couples, the Feast of Agriculture, and the rest—reciting the formulas of the Religion of Patriotism before the altar of La Patrie, delivering Republican orations at the foot of a statue of Liberty crowned with flowers, tracing symbolic furrows in the fertile earth, or exhorting the school children to Republican virtues. But with all his endeavours, the popularity of the Décades in Luzarches was brief. After the first year the Feasts began to drag and men wearied of the processions and crowns and speeches, and returned openly to the labour of the fields or of the shops on the appointed Feast Days. The cause of the Directoire was not popular in that department, as the elections showed.

In the spring of 1798 Benjamin was a candidate for election to the Corps Législatif from his department of La Seine-et-Oise. Luzarches elected him at the primaries in March, but when his name was presented at the electoral assembly at Versailles he did not fare so well. To them his merits were unknown; he was a mere intriguing Royalist (for was he not the friend of Mme. de Staël, and had he not, moreover, paraded as "Baron" in pre-revolutionary days?); a presumptuous stranger who "uttered his metaphysical puns and his political charades on the highest plane, promising the explanatory key in a supplement to his collected works." [2] Once more he had reminded the Directoire of his loyalty on the night when Barras "saved the French Republic and the Liberty of the World," but the elections of this spring were beyond the control of Barras. A schism in the assembly finally put an end to any hope of Constant's election. The contest in all the departments was notorious for the illegal method, that of "double returns" [3] that the Directoire invented in order to throw out undesirable electors; but the trick failed to work, and the Government found itself much worse off after the struggle. Benjamin wrote his aunt that the

[1] In the Revolutionary Calendar the Décade, or period of ten days, was substituted for the week, and the tenth day was a holiday instead of Sunday.

[2] Tambour, B. C. à Luzarches.

[3] When the Government found itself in the minority in the Electoral College, its members might declare that they were not free, retire and organize themselves into a separate college, and return their own candidates, thus offering a choice of two lists of electors.

assembly at Versailles was led by anarchists, and that though he 1798
regretted his defeat he had the consolation of having expressed his political aims unequivocally. He declared his intention to retire now to solitude and to literature, and to renounce his ambitions for a public career, unless he received a very loud call.

His electoral campaign had drawn upon him all the virulence of the Jacobin journals, and especially of *L'Ami des Lois*, the paper which had celebrated so indecently Mme. de Staël's departure from France. Just before the elections Constant had made an address in the Salm Club, which was printed in the *Moniteur*, on the horrors of Terrorism, the dangers of government by force, and the necessity of rallying to the support of the Government in the coming elections. It was a continuation of the theme of all his pamphlets and discourses, but it endorsed the 18th Fructidor still more unreservedly than his speech at the planting of the Liberty tree. " It was your reward ; no intrigue, no calumny can rob you of it," he said. A furious onslaught from the Jacobin papers followed. The *Journal des Hommes Libres*, which was soon after suppressed by the Directoire, propounded a series of questions to " Benjamin, called Constant, Swiss Republican and representative of all the patriots of 1791, in the Constitutional Club." *L'Ami des Lois* kept up an almost daily persecution until after the April elections, prophesying the ruin of the Club through his prominence in it ; and his foreign birth, his noble lineage, his Royalist connections through Mme. de Staël, were continually paraded. His name afforded opportunity for the most obvious of puns. He was declared to be " Constant only in his respect for the friends of the Government," and a Swiss weakness for mercenary and calculating methods was attributed to him as in the following epigram :

" The author of the Réactions,
In his political abstractions,
Speaks so much of factions
Only to hide his actions.
A good use of wit is this,
So much justice I'm glad to accord ;
They say, *No money, no Swiss ;*
He writes, hence he gets his reward."

The violence of the attacks, which continued for two months, testifies to his influence and his talents, which must have been as valuable to his friends as they were formidable to his opponents. But that was small comfort to him, especially when the defeat of

1798 the party from which he had received so little, involved him too. Of all the gibes which he endured, that about his Swiss birth tormented him most, and the usual retaliation was resorted to. On the 26th of April the *Moniteur* noted that a duel had taken place in the Bois, in which the principles were Constant and Sibnet, who was one of the editors of the offending *Ami des Lois*. After Constant had failed to wound his adversary and Sibnet had fired into the air, a reconciliation was effected, in accordance with which the editor declared in his paper that "Citizen Constant" had the respect of Citizen Sibnet. The *Républicain*, lately the *Journal des Hommes Libres*, stated that Constant had convinced his adversary by drawing from his pocket, not a pistol, but a "decree of naturalization," which was, of course, only another jest at his expense.

In the meantime events in Switzerland were opening new possibilities for him. The year 1798 was made memorable there by the invasion of the French, the downfall of the old Confederation under the oligarchy of Berne, and the proclamation of the Helvetic Republic, "one and indivisible." The fall of the Confederation had long been a possibility. The unpopularity of the administration, especially among the Vaudois, has been related. The Cantons of Geneva and Fribourg were also disaffected. The foundation of the "Helvetic Club" had served to propagate liberal ideas, and had not the excesses of the French Convention hurt the cause in Switzerland, the Revolution might have made rapid progress in the popular favour. In order to precipitate all these revolutionary sympathies, two exiles from Switzerland, Fréderic-César La Harpe, tutor to the future Czar of Russia, and Pierre Ochs, both haters of Berne, had been continually plotting to bring about a French invasion. The Bernois, aware that ever since the 18th Fructidor, the Directoire had been considering sending an army to Switzerland, sent three patricians to Paris to dissuade them and to counteract the effect of La Harpe's propaganda. They arrived in Paris in November, but met with little encouragement. Mme. de Staël and Benjamin, however, endorsed their mission. Necker's revenue was derived from feudal possessions, and Mme. de Staël's protest, when learning of the contemplated Revolution—"Everything except the abolition of feudal rights"—may explain in part her patronage of the Bernese envoys. Benjamin had already expressed his contempt for the Swiss brand of Democracy, and shared the views of most of the gentry of Vaud, who preferred the firm hand of Their Excellencies rather than see

their country convulsed by such an upheaval as France was passing through.[1] 1799

But Bonaparte needed money for his Egyptian campaign, and the full treasury of Berne was irresistible. On a bright cold day in January, Mme. de Staël and her father watched from a balcony at Coppet the French troops under General Ménard march along the high road on their way to Berne. The French army spread all over Switzerland; officers were quartered in the houses of the aristocracy; soldiers went shouting and singing through the streets of peaceful Lausanne. "Society is dead," wrote Rosalie. "Only two or three gather together by the fireside. People are petrified with fear. The foreigners of all nationalities are leaving; the bankers are running away with their money as fast as their legs will carry them." On the 5th of February Berne fell, and on the 15th of April, Vaud was incorporated with Geneva as the Department of the Léman, and annexed to France.

The event had a special importance for Benjamin since it not only settled the dispute about his rights to French citizenship, but opened to him another possibility of election to the Corps Législatif, as a representative from Geneva. Mme. de Staël was free now to go to Paris, and during the summer of 1798, which she passed at her old home, St. Ouen, not far from Hérivaux, she and Benjamin no doubt laid their plans for the next elections. In January she rented an apartment in Geneva, and during the six weeks that she passed there she worked zealously for her protégé.[2] Samuel wrote Rosalie that she was "moving heaven and earth, and neither eating nor sleeping," to secure Benjamin's election as Deputy. Mme. de Charrière heard that Barras was opposing her efforts, which was not remarkable: "The confusion is bad enough without these two." Samuel, who also strove to help along Benjamin's cause, reported to Rosalie that his standing in Geneva was excellent; that he was regarded there as an "agreeable, enlightened and learned man," and that the Genevese, judging by what they said, were in favour of him. But several Savoyard candidates had the lead, and on the first vote one of

[1] Benjamin relates (*Souvenirs Historiques*) how, in 1787, he had vowed to a Bernese official, with whom he chanced to travel, that, if ever he had a chance, he would deliver Vaud from the Bernese; but that when the opportunity presented itself eleven years later, after he had experienced the powerlessness of a Revolution to bestow a Liberty based on Justice, he was very cautious of revolutionizing Switzerland.

[2] Kohler (p. 248) prints an interesting letter from Mme. de Staël in his behalf.

1799 them was elected. Geneva, however, was entitled to two representatives, and Samuel, who was dispatching frequent bulletins of the progress of the voting to Lausanne, still had hopes that his nephew might win the second place. The contest was close, but Benjamin failed again, and Mme. de Charrière, not without a certain satisfaction, advised Huber of the "shipwreck" of the faithful pair.

"I can understand the wrath of Our Lady since she cannot now say, 'Benjamin's friends, his father and his relatives, are decidedly stupid, for they never saw what a fortunate thing it was for him to have me as his adviser, extoller and intercessor, as the guiding influence in his affairs. Who among them would have been able to make a legislator of the French Republic out of him?'" (April 27, 1799.)

In the meantime another shipwreck was imminent; events were leading up to the 18th Brumaire, and another opportunity was about to open for Mme. de Staël to show Benjamin's friends the value of her friendship.

The summer of 1799 had been disastrous for the Directoire. Brigandage in the country, bankruptcy in the Treasury, Royalist risings in the provinces, Jacobin plots and, above all, the loss of Italy and the failure of the Egyptian campaign, combined with the Government's vacillating policy to discredit it at home and abroad. The nation was apathetic and no longer cared for principles, but the Royalists were still very much alive and were turning the mistakes of the Government to their own advantage. They flooded the country with pamphlets and with letters from the Pretender to his faithful people. Boulay de la Meurthe wrote a pamphlet to show how the fall of the English Republic had been brought about by the mistakes of the Government, but he passed over the atrocities that had accompanied the Restoration. Benjamin, therefore, hastened to repair his omission in another pamphlet, *Les Suites de la Contre-Révolution de* 1660 *en Angleterre*, a ground on which he was entirely at home. He recounted the disasters and oppressions which were all the credit the restorers of Royalty had to draw upon, and drew a lurid picture of the consequences which the return of the Pretender would have for France, consequences beside which the Law of Hostages and the Forced Loans were insignificant. "At the moment when the Republic was in danger," he wrote his uncle, "it was a pleasure to me to be able to prove that I was attached to the cause by

conviction and independently of its success." The effect of his 1799
pamphlet was, he said, what he had expected, which probably means not very great, but he at once began another, the first of his essays in constitutional law, "a sort of commentary on Godwin's Political Justice," [1] in the course of which he found himself confirmed in his inclinations to a Republican form of government, and in his aversion to most of the measures for establishing such a Government, that had been tried so far. He was shortly to see still another measure tried. In the course of a few hours Bonaparte, the "man of action," and Sièyes, the "man of ideas," had put an end to the dying agonies of the Directoire, and, aided by the shrewd, unscrupulous Fouché, had set up in place of the moribund Constitution of the Year III. an oligarchy of three, headed by Bonaparte as First Consul, which was to lead through all the intermediate stages to the Empire of Napoleon.

On the evening of the 18th Brumaire, Benjamin drove out to the *barrière* to meet Mme. de Staël, who was returning to Paris from Switzerland. The news he brought her was "of a nature to make every lover of Liberty and Law stand aghast." [2] The two Jacobin members of the Directoire were prisoners in the Luxembourg; the Anciens had adjourned to St. Cloud, to avoid being intimidated by the Paris workmen. Barras, forced to resign, had been escorted from Paris by a hundred dragoons, and the streets were filled with Bonaparte's troops. In the Palais Bourbon the Five Hundred were being persuaded by the clever manœuvres of Lucien Bonaparte, and the added argument of a cordon of soldiers, to adjourn. The following day Benjamin haunted St. Cloud for news, dispatching hourly messengers to Mme. de Staël to report the fluctuating temper of the imprisoned deputies. When he notified her that they were pouring, excited and passionate, into their new quarters in the Orangery to swear allegiance to the Dictator, she "prepared to leave France"; when the word was that the deputies were escaping through the windows, she "wept again for Liberty," but breathed more freely for herself.

In his eagerness for a settled Government, and his fear lest the hard-won victories of the Revolution be turned into a Royalist or a Jacobin triumph, Benjamin persuaded himself that, once a

[1] In January 1800 he spoke of this work as still unpublished, both because the conditions of the book trade were unfavourable, and also because Godwin had brought out a new edition which necessitated some changes in his own. It was never published, but exists in MS.

[2] *Considérations sur la Révolution*, part iv. chapter ii.

1799 firm Government was established, it would be easy to turn out Bonaparte, should he develop personal ambitions. It was a naïve illusion, but one which many patriots entertained. He wrote in this vein to his uncle :

" Whatever the future has in store for us, we must serve Liberty to the end, under all its forms, by preserving it as far as possible by yielding to circumstances, to the temper, and above all to the apathy of the nation. The trend of affairs is much stronger than the will of men, and the motto of all who are called to mingle in public matters should be *fata viam invenient.* That has been mine for a long time. To follow one's conscience and consult only that, is the only way not to be destroyed by uncertainties." (January 20, 1800.)

Bonaparte announced that under the new Constitution which he and Sièyes were about to give to France, "a career was open to Frenchmen of all opinions provided that they were enlightened, able and upright." The motto of the political aspirant, *Il faut se montrer*, demanded that Benjamin should call the attention of the First Consul to his qualifications under these requirements. Mme. de Staël thought his gift of eloquence fitted him best for the Tribunat,[1] and asked Chabaud-Latour, who was one of the commission appointed to draw up the Constitution of the Year VIII., to present him to Bonaparte. The interview was satisfactory ; Bonaparte complimented him upon his writings, which he professed to have read and approved, while Benjamin, after expressing his own admiration for the abilities and aims of the First Consul, admitted his desire to further those aims in the Tribunat. " And why not ? " said Bonaparte. " Yes, that is possible ; we will see." Benjamin then protested that there was no danger of his turning out to be one of " those Ideologues who are all for theories " (by which he is supposed to have referred to Sièyes, Bonaparte's rival), but could be counted upon as wholly on Bonaparte's side, for what he desired was "realities." Apparently Benjamin was becoming proficient in the art of wire-pulling, for he went directly from this interview, if we are to credit the account attributed to Chabaud[2] whom he accompanied, to the house of Sièyes on the opposite side of the street, where he bespoke Sièyes'

[1] One of divisions of the new legislative body under Sièyes' Constitution.

[2] Quoted by Gautier from Aimé Martin, *Souv. Inedits.* Chabaud was opposed to the Directoire, and consequently not likely to be free from malice toward a man who defied Bonaparte.

influence also for his nomination to the Tribunat. "You 1799
know," he said, according to Chabaud, "how I detest Force. I will never favour the sword; I want principles, ideals, justice. So if I secure your patronage you may count on me, for I am the greatest enemy of Bonaparte."

The Abbé Sièyes was a member of the Provisional Government which was preparing the Constitution, and Benjamin, who probably knew him in the Constitutional Club, had already asked him to favour his aspirations to serve France, in a letter[1] written five days after the 18th Brumaire. At that time it was not known in what manner the new Constitution would distribute the legislative functions, and Benjamin suggested that he would like a nomination for Deputy, either from the Department of the Léman, where he believed he could be useful to Geneva, which, he said, had suffered greatly under the Directoire, or in that of the Seine-et-Oise, where he had already given three years of public service. He had paid Sièyes the compliment of preferring the representation from the Seine-et-Oise, "as separating me less from you," and added, "To-day when the destiny of the Republic is linked with your name, it would be pleasant to me to serve it under this name which recalls to Europe the first principles of Liberty." He named as men likely to endorse his pretensions, and hence presumably holding political views similar to his own, Daunou, Cabanis, Boulay de la Meurthe and Baudin. Baudin was a member of the committee who had framed the famous decree of the "Re-Election of the Two-Thirds" in 1795; Boulay had been prominent both in the Revolution of Fructidor and in that of Brumaire, and was one day to co-operate with Benjamin in the preparation of the Acte Additionnel, during the Hundred Days. Cabanis and Daunou were writers, the one a well-known philosopher and agnostic, the other a journalist and author; both were appointed to the Tribunat, and both belonged to that refractory group of economists called scornfully "Ideologues,"[2] by Bona-

[1] Dated from rue Grenelle Germain, November 15, 1799. Glachant cites several earlier letters. In his *Souv. Hist.* Constant says that although he saw Sièyes almost daily, from the establishment of the Directoire to the eve of the 18th Brumaire, Sièyes was too suspicious and distant for any intimate relations. "A man of immense *esprit*, his views on politics and metaphysics both subtle and deep, he always had a new and true idea under his abstractions, and contributed more than any one to establish the basis of constitutional monarchy, strange as the statement may seem.

[2] They gave the name to themselves. For an interesting account of them see Guillois, *Le Salon de Mme. Helvetius.*

1799 parte, and to which Sièyes might be expected to lean. Constant knew them well in the *Décade*, a club which, under the mask of sociability, met weekly at a restaurant on the rue du Bac to discuss politics and philosophy.[1] Garat, Ginguené, Andrieux, Chénier, and many others who afterwards figured beside Benjamin in the Tribunat belonged to this Club as well as Bernadotte, whom he took for a leader fifteen years later, and Bonaparte's two brothers, Lucien and Joseph. Mme. de Staël, who was intimate with Lucien, brought her own powers of persuasion to bear on Bonaparte's family. At that time she shared the popular admiration for him, although he disliked her from the first as belonging to the masculine and meddlesome type of woman whom he feared and abhorred. It was perhaps due as much to his brother's importunities, and to his desire to stand well with her Royalist friends as to any confidence in Benjamin's protestations of devotion to his policy that Bonaparte finally wrote Le Brun[2] to put Constant on the list of Tribunes. He had occasion to repent of it almost immediately. "At once," he said, "the mask was discarded. At eleven he begged with all his might; at midnight, the favour bestowed, he had already arrived almost at insult."

The Constitution of the Year III., prepared by Sièyes and promulgated in December 1799, was soon pronounced by Bonaparte to be a "futile dream of a mediocre intelligence." "One hundred men who do nothing but talk, and three hundred men who do nothing but vote, without speaking a word," was how he described it, and to the talkers Benjamin very properly belonged.[3] Nevertheless, as constitutions were of very little importance to the Dictator, it served his purposes as well as another. When it

[1] These reunions were also referred to as the *Tridi*, or *Dîners à Tridi*, as they were held on the third day of each Décade. Begun under the Directoire, they continued under the Consulate, until, some of the members being suspected of having been concerned in the conspiracies of Moreau and Bernadotte, Fouché broke them up, and the members dispersed, some to the salon of Mme. Helvetius at Auteuil and some to Mme. de Staël's salon.

[2] His colleague in the Consulate, with Cambacérès.

[3] The Tribunat was composed of one hundred members, who were to discuss the laws proposed by the Council, but could not vote, and the Corps Législatif of three hundred,who voted on them but could not discuss them. Barante (*Souvenirs*) says that Bonaparte attached little importance to the Tribunat, and let Sièyes and the philosophical coterie do as they pleased with it. Barante (*Hist. de la Directoire*) says that the logical province of the Tribunat seemed to be opposition, as that of the Council was defence, and that of the Corps Législatif, decision—and the type of men (literary) put on it seemed to confirm this idea.

had been accepted by a plebiscite of over three million votes 1800
against about fifteen hundred, the legislature was called together. On the first day of January the new Tribunat assembled in the Palais Royal which had been the scene of so many historic events. But the once elegant square in which Camille Desmoulins had set up the Tricolour, was now so surrounded by gambling-houses and *maisons de plaisir*, that the public was disposed to amuse itself at the expense of the new assembly. The majority of its members had won their laurels in literature rather than in politics. Daunou, who was elected its president, had been in the Church before he was in the Convention, was an art collector, and edited *Le Journal des Savants*. Other troublesome members were Ginguené, director of that "School of Impiety," the *Décade*, who had led the movement to carry the ashes of Rousseau to the Pantheon; Marie-Joseph Chénier, brother of the poet, and himself a writer of plays; Cabanis, the rationalist; Andrieux, the dramatic poet; Riouffe, Chazal,—many of them habitués of the salon of Mme. Helvetius at Auteuil, and most of them soon to be swept off on the rubbish heap of Ideologues by the Dictator, who hated nothing so much as theorizers.

Constant had no idea of sitting in the Tribunat merely to draw his salary of fifteen hundred francs. He took his responsibilities with a seriousness quite unexpected by those who judged him merely by his habits of jesting and trifling. He had well-formed theories of the duties of the Tribunat, and he lost no time in asserting them. He wrote his aunt that he had wanted this appointment very much:

"Not as a pleasure—is there any such thing in life?—but as a task, as an opportunity to fulfil a duty, which is the only thing to lift the burden of doubt, of memory, of unrest—the eternal lot of our transitory nature. Those for whom pleasure has charms, for whom novelty still exists, and who have preserved the happy faculty of enjoyment, do not need a vocation; but those who have lost their physical and moral youth must have a distinct mission to do good, in order not to sink into discouragement and apathy. I have accepted this appointment, and will try to live up to the position." (To Mme. de Nassau, 30 Nivose, An VIII.)

He lived up to it too well to suit Bonaparte. On the 5th of January the first bill was to be presented to the Tribunat for discussion, a bill to regulate procedure on Government measures. Since the publication of the new Constitution, the legislators had had an opportunity to discover how limited

1800 were the powers it allowed them, and Constant and his friends in the Tribunat had been preparing for that method of impeding the already discernible despotism of Bonaparte, which enriched the French vocabulary with the phrase *tribuner*, as expressive of "ways that are dark and tricks that are vain." They foresaw that the bill would be rushed through without allowing sufficient time for the examination and discussion of its provisions, and that the Tribunat was about to be deprived of its sole prerogative, that of "talking." They determined to assert at the outset their opposition to any such action. Mme. de Staël, exonerating herself from the charge of having initiated this opposition, has related in a much-quoted passage of her *Dix Anneés d'Exil* how, at her soirée on the evening before the presentation of the bill, "One of the Tribunes, a friend of Liberty and endowed with one of the most remarkable minds which nature has bestowed on any man—M. Benjamin Constant"—consulted her about a speech he proposed to make "to point out the dawn of Tyranny." Looking around her drawing-room, with its brilliant gathering of ministers, senators and councillors, he warned her that if he made this speech, her salon on the following evening would be deserted. "I encouraged him with all the strength of my conscience," she says. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that on the morrow she listened with some trepidation, when, after a few prudent words from Girardin upon the necessity for moderation in the present unsettled condition of the nation, the bill was favourably reported by Mathieu de Montmorency for the Commission. He closed in the high-flown, oratorical style admired in those days—"Tribunes, it is your duty to speak to the people of France in the austere language of truth, to arouse in them that generous devotion which leads to self-sacrifice and to strenuous effort. Yours to strike the lyre in praise of those Republican sentiments which find so ready a response in every French heart, and to silence the false note of despotism, should it ever ring through the air about you!"

One after another the members sprang to their feet in protest, eager to demonstrate the emptiness of the functions which the Constitution had granted them. The fifth to speak was Constant, declaring that the very wording of the bill showed how the constitutional object of the Tribunat had been misunderstood.

"The Government has evidently taken it for granted that the Tribunat will meet all its measures in the spirit of blind opposition, and will spend its time in altering or retarding every bill that comes before it. Hence the clauses of this bill designed

to elude our vigilance by rushing through the measures in hot haste, or by veiling their true meaning in the hope that we may fail to understand them. . . . In reply I would say to the Government: Fruitless as our debates may be, do nothing to mutilate them; vain as our resistance is, let it have fair play. Do not grudge us the use of language, which, after resounding through these rafters, will too often be lost upon the empty air; do not turn the Tribunat into a mere sham and make it the laughing-stock of Europe!" 1800

There was a tremendous sensation in the hall of the Tribunes, after this challenge of Constant's, which recalled to some the brilliant and haughty thrusts of Mirabeau. But on the whole, when all men were sighing for peace, the bitterness of the attack was condemned as the attempt of a vain and ambitious stranger to make himself conspicuous. The effect was to rally opinion on the side of the First Consul. When Constant proposed amendments providing for a minimum of five days for the discussion of each bill in the Tribunat, and for the same in the Corps Législatif (which alone had the right to vote), and for a statement of the reasons for each bill that was presented, he evoked such a storm of abuse, even from his old friend Riouffe, among others, and such an outburst of fulsome flattery of the First Consul, that the Speaker was obliged to call the assembly to order. When calm reigned once more, a vote was taken, and the Government was supported by fifty-four against twenty-six, while in the other Chamber the support was even larger. But the note of defiance which he had sounded was in the future to be the battle-cry of those twenty-six, who were destined to remain always the hopeless minority, faint yet pursuing.

When the First Consul learned of Constant's onslaught, he had one of his terrible fits of rage. "I am a soldier, I will not allow myself to be insulted like a king," he cried.[1] An article appeared in the official paper on the 8th, which clearly proceeded from him, and which was aimed unmistakably at Constant.

"Every one has a thirst for glory. Every one wants to place his name in the hundred mouths of Fame, but some people are still ignorant that we attain renown less surely by haste to say nothing, than by faithfulness in serving usefully, obscurely even, a public which judges as well as applauds."

[1] Bonaparte says in his journal that Constant "put himself into the Opposition thinking that I would buy him. He should have known that I tread on my enemies; I do not buy them."

1800 On the same day the Jacobin *Journal des Hommes Libres*, which was directed by Fouché and which had already protested against the admission of the " Swiss Constant " into the Tribunat, came out with an outrageous little dialogue between him, Mme. de Staël and the French people, which made her guilty of having brought him to France, and of having filled him with a mania for Liberty and Principles. It closed with these words :

" Take away your Benjamin. Let him go and exhibit his talents in the Swiss Senate. Let him beware of coming to disturb a people who are tired of his schemings and of yours. I have spoken ! "

The Royalist paper, *L'Ange Gabriel*, joined in the outcry, with an article also aimed first at Mme. de Staël—" writing on metaphysics which she does not understand, on morals which she does not practise, on the virtues of her sex which she does not possess " —which represented her as crying to Benjamin whom she had " succeeded in decorating with the toga of the Tribunat " :

" France is ours ! . . . Scream, my friend—scream, storm, make a noise, rail at authority ! I know the country ; it is the way to succeed. . . . Benjamin will be consul, I will give the finance to Papa, my uncle will have the Department of Justice, my husband a distant embassy ; for myself, I shall have the supervision of everything, and without doubt I shall preside over the Institut."

These extracts are quoted, not as reflecting on either of their victims, but as examples of the kind of newspaper abuse which gave rise to the agitation against a free press. Perhaps no one was subjected to so much public abuse and ridicule as Mme. de Staël, or had so many enemies, or by circumstances of life and peculiarities of character ever furnished so ready a target for witticisms. But, also, no one ever had more, or more devoted friends, and justice requires that in exhibiting her weaknesses, we should not forget that the epoch now under discussion is almost as closely associated with her as with Napoleon himself. The dignity and good sense of this much-enduring woman appear in the preface to *Les Passions*, where she says :

" Condemned to celebrity without being able to make myself known, I feel need of causing myself to be judged through my writings. Slandered unceasingly, and finding myself too unimportant to bring myself to speak of myself, I have been obliged to

yield to the hope of giving some true idea of my life and character, 1800
in publishing this fruit of my meditations."

On the day following his " independent " speech in the Tribunat, Benjamin gave a dinner to which he had already invited many persons connected with the newly formed Government who had shown him flattering attentions. But with the exception of two, who belonged to his coterie and who were bound to follow him, every one declined at the last moment. " From this time date the attacks of my enemies and my tribulations," he wrote in his journal five years afterwards. Shortly after that, Mme. de Staël received ten regrets for a dinner she was giving in his honour, among those who refused to come being Roederer, a member of the Council, and Talleyrand. She was overwhelmed at the affront, not having believed that Bonaparte would hold her responsible for Benjamin's misbehaviour, for, she wrote Roederer, " What woman has shown herself more enthusiastic for Bonaparte than I ? " When Fouché, who was Minister of Police, advised her to take a *villeggiatura* at St. Ouen, she replied that " M. Constant was of too superior intelligence to take his opinions from a woman, and that, moreover, the speech in question contained mere reflections upon the independence that every assembly of Liberals should enjoy, and nothing that should offend the First Consul personally." To this the Minister politely agreed ; but the ban was not lifted.

" You think I said too little," Benjamin wrote his uncle. " The little that I did say was considered so much too much that it resulted in a greater downfall, more persecutions and dangers, than I can or will tell you. By dint of prudence and of always proceeding with the greatest conscientiousness, I have, I believe, dissipated the many clouds which were piled up over my head." But the clouds were not driven completely from the horizon, and when Bonaparte went to Geneva to inquire into the advisability of fortifying that city, Benjamin begged Samuel to note carefully anything he might say about his unruly Tribune, and at the same time warned him to remember, in any conversation he might have with the First Consul, " that we are all, you and I and our family, surely and always Genevese. There is not the slightest word which does not count in life, and may not sooner or later have its effect."

As the weeks passed, and the futility of the Tribunat became more apparent, the disappointment of his political life depressed

1800 Constant, and he soon became indifferent. Although he struggled to keep his principles in evidence, he had clearly lost interest in discussions which were merely a form, and he created another sensation when he suggested as an occupation for the Tribunat, "the vagueness of whose uses was in such contrast to the activity of its constitution," that its supposed function of receiving petitions from the citizens, which had lapsed into an empty form owing to its inability to act, be extended and defined. This proposition, which aimed to give the Tribunat more influence as well as something to do in the summer when the Corps Législatif adjourned for its vacation, was hotly combated, especially by his arch-enemy Chauvelin, and the measure was lost.

As there were only two sessions a month during the vacation of the other Chamber, Benjamin retired in disgust to Hérivaux, and buried himself in his library. With the intention of resuming his translation of Godwin, and his *History of Religions*, which had been laid aside since he had entered political life, he took with him a young secretary, who, in the solitude of the country, "became very melancholy in spite of the interest which my work should inspire in him," he wrote his aunt, and did not remain long with him. But the peaceful atmosphere of his domains affected Benjamin differently, and he found himself capable of serious and steady work. Moreover, he enjoyed his dignity of landlord. His estate was large enough to give him some responsibilities as a farmer, and by this time he must have been reaping some harvest from the fruit trees which he had planted two years before, and which had then called forth some jests from his aunt about his walking under his shade trees with a parasol. The arrangement of his library was another occupation which he enjoyed, for he had a passion for books, and, when travelling, could never pass a city with a fine library without stopping to inspect it. When he was at Colombier he already possessed between two and three thousand books, which was a fair-sized library for that time. They had been carried back and forth between Colombier and Lausanne and Brunswick in his peregrinations, packed and repacked, and considerably increased in numbers in the course of years. In 1793 he wrote:

"Tell M. de Charrière that I am very much piqued at his judging my library by certain old volumes. I have all the books which I have heard him, as well as you, wish for. The Encyclopedias, the *Histoire Générale des Voyages*, *Cérémonies Réligieuses*, all the English writers of any merit, the *Mémoires pour servir a l'Histoire*

de France—in short I have a thousand good books which the ignorant M. de Charrière might easily be tempted to honour with a glance." (October 28, 1793.) 1800

Although he gave the preference to works of reference along the line of his studies, and although it is probable that the poets were not well represented in his collection, it was his boast that his was a library of solid books, books of erudition, as befitted his education and tastes. "My dear, my very dear library," he called it, with all the tenderness of a bibliophile, and when he heard that his cousin, Wilhelm de Sévery, had inherited Gibbon's library, he wrote enviously, "I wish he had left it to me!"

His cares as landlord were complicated by the frequency and length of his absences in Paris and Switzerland, but his sense of humour came to his rescue in this as in all else. An undated letter to his aunt reported himself as "plunged up to the ears in little domestic embarrassments." He had found, upon his return, his property in "lovely disorder." His gamekeeper had acquired "the most beautiful baby in the world"; his vine-grower was going regularly to the hunt; and his gardener had developed into a perfect horseman. "It gave me great pleasure to discover this multitude of new talents, as you may believe. However, I wished to render this domestic improvement a little more applicable to actual conditions, so I have been obliged to get rid of the majority of my amateurs, from whom I parted with the respect due to genius."

The mild social relations which came to him in connection with his position in the community amused him too. Moreover, he always enjoyed for a time the solitude that he found here, and that he persuaded himself was what he required for the development of his talents, although events showed that it was only in the thick of contest and the whirl of affairs that this perverse man could really accomplish his literary aims. It was the healing rather than the stimulus of solitude that he craved, in truth, a refuge from his disappointments and discouragements, where the journals could not follow him with their abuse and the torments of political ambitions were still. It is only from Hérivaux that he ever wrote like this:

"I am enjoying the most beautiful spring I have ever seen; the trees that I have planted are beginning to promise a little shade, the nightingales are singing, the moon is shining, the water is flowing, and there isn't a human being for half a league around.

1800 I drink with rapture this profound peacefulness which has all the charm of novelty." (May 1, 1797.)

After passing the summer and autumn at Hérivaux, with the exception of a short visit to Mme. de Staël at Geneva, he returned to Paris in November for the reopening of the Chambers. He found the position of the First Consul greatly strengthened by the events of the summer. The victory of Marengo had made him the idol of the nation, and it was a hopeless fight that the little party in the Tribunat was keeping up. Benjamin relapsed into his old discouragement and lassitude, and wrote his aunt, "I am plunged in the state of ennui to which Paris always reduces me when I return after a long absence; this tumult, these men immersed in their own personal affairs, while they have not a quarter of an hour to give to matters of the deepest importance, all this wearies and disgusts me."

On the 24th of December the guests at Mme. de Staël's dinner-table heard several sharp reports as if something had exploded. It was the infernal machine, set off in the path of the carriage that was carrying Bonaparte to the opera. "Worse than a crime, it was a blunder," said Fouché,[1] for the nation, in its terror of another Revolution, increased its servile devotion to the Dictator. He was quick to seize this opportunity to introduce a law establishing special tribunals to judge crimes against the public peace and political offences; the trials to be without jury, by judges the majority of whom were nominated by himself, and therefore controlled by him. At once Constant's zeal was awakened. Together with Daunou, Ginguené and Chénier, he attacked the law as arbitrary. By means of some clever manipulations and by appealing to private interests in the country districts, the law was passed, but by a small majority. Bonaparte was furious at the "nebulous metaphysicians who think themselves a party," for while to the nation the resistance of this handful of men seemed mere quibbling, Bonaparte saw how dangerous it might become if it set the people thinking. He therefore caused an article to be inserted in the *Moniteur* against the existence, in a "free government like that of France," of an opposition party such as England had, where the King was "the people's enemy"; whereas in France, to combat the Executive, who was the people's representative, was to combat the people. This ingenious argument

[1] This epigram is also ascribed to Talleyrand on the occasion of the murder of the Duc d'Enghien.

only redoubled the resistance of Benjamin and his friends, but 1801
their hope of victory grew ever fainter. "I find myself in my accustomed rank in the Legislature," he wrote Rosalie, "that is, in the minority." The year was, on the whole, a repetition of the previous one, so far as he was concerned, even to the visit to Mme. de Staël in the summer. November found them both back in Paris.

The session opened that autumn with a number of treaties which had to be ratified, and, with one exception, they were passed without serious opposition. The exception was Thibaut's vigorous protest against the use of the word "subjects" in the treaty with Russia. "Frenchmen are citizens, not subjects," he objected. The Government's explanation that the word referred to the *émigrés* did not satisfy the critics. Constant made a mild protest, and was followed by a fierce tirade from Chénier about the martyred Frenchmen who had died that they might not be "subjects." The consideration of the Civil Code was the next signal for disturbance from the Opposition, and so rough was the handling it received that Bonaparte angrily withdrew it until a more propitious time, and the Government "went into winter quarters." Meanwhile he was preparing his revenge. "You belong to the mathematical section of the Institut," he said to Andrieux, "and therefore you know that you can only lean against that which resists." When he left for Lyons, where he was to have himself put at the head of the new "Italian Republic," he delegated to Cambacérès the task of finding a means of ridding him of "Sièyes' followers." According to the Constitution, the Tribunat was renewable by fifths, but the method of retirement had not been defined. It was Cambacérès' ingenuity which devised the very simple but effective means of balloting for the retiring members, instead of drawing lots for those who should remain, and he had no trouble in forcing this plan on the Councils and the Senate. The balloting for the twenty retiring men took place on the 19th of January. It is needless to say that Benjamin's name was not on the list of those retained. With him went Chénier, Cabanis, Andrieux, Ginguené, Daunou, and other less distinguished but no less inconvenient opponents of the Government. "Vermin on my clothes," cried Bonaparte, "but I will shake them off!"

"They have taken the cream off the Tribunat!" exclaimed Mme. de Staël.

CHAPTER XI

COPPET AND WEIMAR

(1802–1804)

1802 AFTER the "creaming" of the Tribunat, Constant, and the Ideologues who shared his fate, retired from the political field and took refuge in their literary and scientific pursuits. Mme. de Staël's salon, too, suffered an eclipse. The Revolutionists had always distrusted her, and in consequence, Benjamin; while many of her Royalist friends had been alienated by her endorsement of the 18th Fructidor, for which they held him responsible. Most of them secretly detested him, and believed her intimacy with him had been harmful to her in many respects. They thought he was "wearing out her mind," and they talked to each other about his "venomous imagination," and compared him to a "false violin" whose discords compel attention by the pain that they inflict. Mme. de Beaumont, who frequently saw them together at Ormesson,[1] believed that she could detect an unnatural stimulus to Mme. de Staël's *esprit*, which was the result of her contact with Benjamin's, and that she had lost the "noble and generous qualities of heart which had made her so lovable." Thibaudeau confessed to a strong antipathy to him, and described his manner as "disagreeable and peremptory"; "I seemed always to feel Talleyrand behind him, pulling the strings that moved him." After Benjamin's speech in the Tribunat Joubert [2] wrote:

"This Benjamin, who is a perpetual innovator, the enemy of all order, of all moderation, and who ought to be banished from a civilized state, thought he was going to be sent back to Switzerland, and Mme. de Staël with him. They came near leaving for fear of it. However, she has to stay at St. Ouen. Her house, they say, was the rendezvous of all malcontents. That is what

[1] Country-place of Mathieu de Montmorency, not far from Hérivaux.

[2] Author of the celebrated *Pensées*. He was a Royalist sympathizer, and detested Constant.

they get for their childish eagerness to play at opposition, without really knowing what opposition means, as Riouffe [1] says. I am miserable at seeing the fate of a woman whom I love bound to that of a man absolutely detestable." (February 2, 1800.) 1801

But while Mme. de Staël's friends thus blamed Benjamin for all her mistakes, Bonaparte traced all Constant's defiance to her intriguings, and revenged himself by affecting to be scandalized at the openness of their intimacy and her neglect of her husband who, he said, was living in penury while his wife revelled in balls and dinner-parties.

An absence in Switzerland, however, and the repute of her new book on Literature which appeared in the autumn of 1801, restored her former popularity, at least in certain circles, and she was once more able to enjoy that "most exquisite pleasure of her life," the pleasure of conversation in Paris. Among the distinguished foreigners and diplomats who now formed the nucleus of her society, Benjamin was always to be seen, perfectly at home, observing, mocking, jesting. The character of these gatherings had altered in deference to the suspicions of the First Consul; they had become literary rather than political, and at the readings from new books or dramas with which she entertained her guests, Benjamin sometimes met the young, and almost unknown *émigré*, lately returned to France, Chateaubriand, whose new novel, *Atala*, had just appeared. It is interesting to put beside Benjamin's account of her salon in the early days of the Directoire, the following description by Chênedollé,[2] of the people whom he met at her soirées during the latter years of the Consulate:

"We used to see there Chateaubriand in all the éclat of his first glory, Mme. Récamier in all the delicate flower of her grace and her youth, Mme. Visconti with her majestic Roman beauty, the Chevalier de Boufflers in the *négligé* of a country vicar, but with all the exquisite air and all the arts of a courtier . . . and among the politicians, Benjamin Constant, tall, erect, good-looking, his long hair falling in curls [3] on his neck. He had an extraordinary

[1] Riouffe opposed Constant's proposed amendments to the Bill to Regulate Proceedings in the Tribunat, on January 1, 1800.

[2] A French man-of-letters who left a journal to which Sainte-Beuve had access.

[3] Benjamin's hair enjoyed great social and political notoriety, of which he was not unaware. He wrote his aunt (30th Pluviose, 1802), apropos of a novel translated by Mme. de Montolieu, that he was tenderly attached to the hero: "I like to have the hero of a novel who inspires great passion possess red hair; this should be an indispensable attribute, and I maintain that it is

1801 expression of mockery and malice in his smile, and especially in his eyes. Nothing could be wittier than his conversation. Always epigrammatic, he discussed the deepest political questions with lucid, concise and forcible logic, his argument tinged with sarcasm. When, with marvellous but subtle skill, he led his adversary into the snare he had laid for him, he left him there confounded and helpless, under the blow of an epigram from which there was no recovery. No one ever understood so well the art of overthrowing an opponent in conversation, in a style quite worthy of Mme. de Staël."

She would have been glad to drag Benjamin about with her in the endless round of concerts, dinners, balls and soirées, which were to her the very breath of life, but he "swam away." He must have smiled to hear her tell Etienne Dumont, at a small dinner where Hochet [1] was the fourth guest, that she preferred agriculture to politics, and that she would like to retire before she was old, but that "solitude is the antechamber of death." In the spring, however, he consented to attend her on a sad errand which took her to Switzerland, in order to assist, if need be, in the care of her dying husband. The visit of Baron de Staël to Coppet to which reference has been made in another chapter, was probably the last occasion when they had appeared together as husband and wife. At that time Mme. de Staël had written a friend that he no longer took the slightest interest in her, and merely afforded her an opportunity to ruin herself by paying his debts. It is unnecessary to enlarge upon the evident unsuitability of this marriage. Although a spendthrift, the Baron seems not to have been devoid of attractive qualities, however, and Rosalie de Constant thought him "more agreeable than all the lovers of the Beauty." She described his manner as "crushed and timid," and his wife as "haughty and disdainful toward him," and thought she showed poor taste in talking in his presence of her love for

a great mark of *esprit* and of sensibility. I had been wearing a blond wig this winter, but I have given it up this summer in order that I may appear before you in all my glory. . . . Since my letters cannot melt you, the glory of my locks may perhaps be more successful." In his youth it was "red," but in 1820 Rosalie was astonished to read in the papers of his "beautiful blond curls"; and Charles, when he saw him in Paris in 1822, was struck with his "beautiful blond hair arranged with much art and coquetry." Rudler saw an advertisement in the *Intermédiare des Chercheurs* (June 1797) of a "curl cut from his head after death, warm blond, shot with golden lights."

[1] A literary man, who wrote for the *Publiciste* and the *Journal des Débats*. In 1816 he was Secretary of State. He relates the above episode.

Benjamin, to whom, she announced, she had "dedicated" her life. Although there was no divorce, they had been formally separated in 1797; but when the tidings came to Mme. de Staël in Paris that her husband was seriously ill, she wrote him that "the past would be forgotten," and started at once for Coppet, taking the sick man with her. Fifteen miles from their destination he had a stroke of apoplexy and died almost immediately. Benjamin, who kept within call on this journey, wrote his friend Fauriel from Vitraux, on the Côte d'Or, in a tone whose weariness and depression is not wholly traceable to the downfall of his political ambitions—("in life there are so many causes of sadness," he said): 1802

"It is some time since I wrote you, my friend, that I would come to see you soon after Mme. de Staël's departure, and behold me one hundred leagues from you, on the way to Geneva. I could not refuse to follow her at a short distance, because as she was bringing her sick husband she wanted me to be in a position to join her if anything befell him on the way. I have never made a sacrifice for her which, for a thousand reasons, was so painful for me. If I should confide to you what I feel, and the profound disgust which I have conceived for life, I would weary you greatly —you, who are in the bosom of peace and happiness. I am far from either, and I believe that I am buying pain at the price of disquietude. That happens to many people who do not suspect it. There is a kind of complication called Fate, which it is impossible to disentangle, and with which one revolves, suffering all the time, without ever setting foot on earth to look about. Perhaps, however, happiness is almost impossible, at least for me, since I do not find it with the best and most intelligent of women. I perceive that the supposition is uncivil, and I withdraw it in favour of the mistress of *La Maisonnette*.[1] I will write to her directly in a few days. I would like to express to her my regrets at not having availed myself of an invitation which was to have been a real fête for me. She will understand them, these poignant regrets, much better than you. . . . I must stop these sad exclamations, and speak to you of yourself, who are happy, and who, in the midst of clouds of every kind which cover our horizon, offer me a consoling and pleasant point of view. Oh, guard well this rare plant which is called happiness! It is so difficult to acquire, and it is almost impossible to find it again!

"I will not speak to you of public affairs. Doubtless they furnish a great cause for satisfaction, but I am too melancholy to concern myself with them. My only approach to them will be through working, if I can, on this book, of which I talk continually, and which does not grow. Solitude is indispensable for

[1] See p. 202.

1802 all the faculties as well as for all enjoyment. I am condemned to society; at least I have been, and of all the many hells of Dante, I believe that to be the most painful in the long run. I suppose that without talking so much about it, you are working more and better.

"Write me what you are doing; your letters will be a genuine pleasure to me, and that is a rarity in my life. I expect consequently that you will grant it to me freely. Address me at Versoix, Department of the Léman. I shall be there in five days, as General Leclerc said when speaking of the Peace of Toussaint." (April 20, 1802.)

As he perhaps was foreseeing when he wrote this letter, Benjamin was more necessary than ever to Mme. de Staël after her husband's death, since the period of mourning necessitated a curtailment of any social distractions Geneva might have afforded. The summer passed very quietly at Coppet. In June Rosalie announced to Charles that her cousin was expected at the house of a relative, in company with the "celebrated widow," and that in consequence that relative's household was in a state of turmoil, as it was necessary to "prepare listeners for Mme. de Staël." In August Rosalie was herself a guest at Coppet, with her aunt, Mme. de Charrière de Bavois, and the events of this visit were preserved in her journal for Charles.

"We started yesterday at five, in cloudy weather which soon changed to storm. . . . We arrived at Coppet at night and quite wet. We wandered about for some time in the big château, without meeting the spirits which inhabit it. Some very obliging servants paid their respects to us very properly. At last the lady of the house, later our distinguished cousin, welcomed us cordially. They adapted themselves to our habits, to our style, so that the conversation flowed easily, and assumed the tone of cordiality and liveliness. It was difficult for me to accustom myself to the lightness with which things were discussed which, especially for a woman, were better kept in the depths of the heart; the most sacred sentiments, even those which one would not mention aloud. When she spoke about her intentions, I felt almost as if she had spoken about mine, and as if mine had been very interesting ones. Nevertheless, this freedom of manner between them explains why they do not want to marry.

"Benjamin was very friendly, frank and always very amusing. M. Necker inspires a special feeling of veneration and tenderness. His appearance extraordinarily imposing; his manner serious, sad, solemn, yet so kind. The whist party was very funny. Benjamin did not pay court to them. His manner is that of an amiable, indulged child, who pleases involuntarily, and who knows

how to get everything. Nevertheless, it would be impossible for 1802
me to be at ease in this company." (August 23, 1802.)

During this sojourn in Switzerland, Benjamin's intimacy with Rosalie was greatly strengthened by the need he evidently felt of a confidant to whom he could pour out his discontent and restlessness. Samuel, who had never thoroughly liked his nephew, and in consequence had always repelled him, had died in 1800, and Rosalie now made her home with her aunt at La Chaumière, a tiny estate near Ouchy. The *bonne tante* was more approachable, and Benjamin soon got the habit of dropping in upon the two ladies quite informally at their tea-drinkings or their sewing, or their evening readings at the fireside. The "good aunt" had *prétentions*, whether artistic or literary or social—of a very harmless character at any rate, but sufficient to warrant a certain mild confusion, internal, in all probability, as well as external. Thus her *ménage* was not remarkable for its tidiness, and Rosalie despaired sometimes of ever keeping the little drawing-room in order, for slippers, bottles and candles had a way of getting on the harpsichord in company with a confusion of drawings and books, and it was useless to clear them up, for the next moment all was chaos again. But her celebrated Saturday reunions, over which she presided with kindly dignity, had won for her the title of "Abbess," and her little villa, surrounded by meadows and orchards, and entered through a court where a rustic fountain dripped from the mossy trunk of an ancient willow, announced, says Rosalie, the taste of its mistress—"rural elegance combined with simple furnishings." On Saturdays La Chaumière was the rendezvous of the local *littérateurs*, and of any foreigners of consequence who were in Lausanne. Mme. de Staël, with her turban, her train of followers, her loud voice and her metropolitan manners, overwhelmed rather than graced these modest assemblies, where "women of culture, without pedantry, and simple young girls"[1] partook of "conversation, reading and a dainty supper," or edified the company with original essays and with proverbs, charades, or little comedies of their own composition. As for Benjamin, his rôle in this society, of bored, indifferent silence, or of trifling and ridicule, when he did vouchsafe to speak, must have been still more disconcerting to the guests, and it is probable that the ladies of La Chaumière liked him much better in the intimacy of their fireside communings.

[1] Pastor Bridel, in the *Conservateur Suisse*, vol. viii.

1802 Some people, and among them her brother Charles, imputed to Rosalie a more than cousinly interest in Benjamin, notwithstanding that he was several years her junior; but this she emphatically denied, alleging her grandmother's dying charge that she should watch over the motherless boy, as the reason for her loyalty to him. Hitherto it had been a difficult task to fulfil, for her traditions were perpetually outraged by his erratic conduct, and he, on his side, had never felt at ease with his relatives. But now she noted with satisfaction that his character was improving every day, that he was more friendly and more thoughtful of the rights of others. She was pleased to see how his childlike mischief amused her aunt, and was proud of the nobility and kindness of his attitude towards his father in the matter of Marianne and her family, who were now openly acknowledged. She began to understand her cousin, and to draw some shrewd conclusions as to his attitude towards life, and his relations with his friend. "In spite of all the severe things he says about life, I think he is quite as disposed as ever to enjoy all the good things it has to offer him." "The death of passions and attachments is so painful a moment that he would console himself by a perpetual indifference." And again, "If she draws the chain too tight, she is in danger of breaking it."

The charming château of Coppet, where Mme. de Staël and Benjamin spent the year between the death of the Baron and their nearly simultaneous return to Paris in the spring of 1803, does not strike the modern visitor as a place of banishment. Its red-tiled roofs and friendly yellow walls brood cosily over the picturesque, irregular, lichen-tinted houses of the ancient village to which it has given its name. The estate extends along the crest of a low stretch of hill which separates the foot-hills of the Jura from the Lake of Geneva. The high road to Lausanne runs beneath the walls of the château, and the main street of the village climbs straight up the hill past the gates of the entrance court. Crossing the cobble-stones of this outer courtyard, where the doves nestle and coo on the turrets of the offices, and the water drips cheerfully from twin stone fountains in the wall on either side of the gateway, one passes through a low arch under the left wing of the mansion to the court of honour. It is a large, sunny square, bordered by flowering plants and palms, and enclosed on three sides by the house—a gracefully proportioned building, with dormer windows in its sloping roof, and charming turreted pavilions at the four corners. Through the tall wrought-iron gates which separate it from the park, the broad level lawn can be seen, broken

only by a circular pond and bounded by shady paths, beside one 1802
of which a swift little brook gurgles over its steep, stony bed down the hill to the lake. In these bosky retreats, whose remoteness from any glimpses of the far-famed beauty of Lake Léman remind their present owner[1] that they belong to a time when "people did not walk for the sake of the view but to enjoy conversation," the wits and scholars of many lands were wont to pace, holding converse with the goddess who reigned there, and the "nymphs who haunt such shady recesses" sometimes heard with dismay tempestuous weeping, sighs, reproaches, quarrels, reconciliations (or at any rate Sismondi heard them and confessed it in after years) between the temperamental mistress of Coppet and that most charming and most tantalizing of her guests, Benjamin Constant.

The interior of the château has been preserved by M. d'Haussonville (who is a descendant of its former mistress) exactly as it was a century ago. Here in the wide hall, which extends across the front of the house, the sunlight flooding its white walls and its worn stone floor, stands the marble statue of Necker, declaiming with uplifted hand and head thrown back. Glass doors lead to the library, which is lined with carved bookcases and bronzes, and to the salon where the theatrical performances took place in which Benjamin did violence to the histrionic muse and mortified his cousin Rosalie. Beyond, in the bedroom of the châtelaine, is the worn old red portfolio on which, surrounded by her guests in her drawing-room, she wrote most of her books. The salon above, whose windows look over the tree-tops and over the roofs of the village to the lake and the mountains, is gay and cheerful, with its marquetry furniture upholstered in crimson and pearl. The *chaise-longue* must surely be that on which Chateaubriand first saw Mme. Récamier, so often a guest here, on that memorable occasion when she disposed her graceful white-robed form upon the becoming background of a "blue satin sofa." The spacious apartment seems full of pleasant ghosts; their familiar faces look down from their portraits; Necker, pompous and solemn, with his long, heavy chin; "Corinne" in her turban and curls, with the inevitable green twig in her hands; her mother, blue-eyed and prim under a towering white wig; Baron de Staël, good-natured and banal; Albertine, young and lovely, with her tell-tale golden locks and sleepy golden eyes and smiling mouth;

[1] Comte d'Haussonville, a descendant of Mme. de Staël, who has written an interesting monograph on Coppet.

1802 Albertine as the Duchesse de Broglie, older, delicate, sad, exquisite ; and by the chimney-piece, a pencil drawing of Benjamin, a little wistful, his head on one side, his curls in disorder, with the same narrow, sleepy eyes, the delicate mouth, half-smiling, gently cynical—a truly fascinating picture.

Paris does not seem a great sacrifice in exchange for this peaceful, luxurious retreat, but Mme. de Staël's restless ambition rarely found happiness here. " The phantom of ennui has always pursued me," she wrote. Nor do Benjamin's letters from Coppet at this period indicate that he was any more contented than she in this château, where, according to Bonstetten,[1] " more mind was expended in a day than in most places in a whole year." He complains much of ill-health, of serious difficulties with his eyes, of longing for solitude and of loss of interest in public affairs. That he should be able to work at all on the *History of Religions* which he had now started for the fourth time, he counted a great achievement, in the environment in which he was living. This summer of 1802 must have been trying for them both, for as yet the days when the society of Coppet won from Sismondi the phrase " magic lantern of the universe " had not dawned. The life of the family was, during Necker's lifetime, grave and sedate, as described by one who was a guest[2] at this time, but notable for its " prodigious intellectual activity, excited by the presence of M. Necker, Mme. de Staël and Benjamin Constant." The same informant proceeds :

" They gathered for breakfast in Mme. de Staël's room (they drank only coffee then). This breakfast lasted two hours, for as soon as they assembled, Mme. de Staël raised a question, more often chosen from the realm of literature, or from philosophy, than from that of politics, and this out of consideration for her father, whose career on this stage had terminated so unfortunately. But whatever the subject of discussion, it was attacked with a liveliness of imagination and a profundity from which Benjamin Constant derived his best training, and from which gushed forth all that the human mind could conceive and create. . . . Each then retired until dinner, which passed off in a perpetual quarrel between M. Necker and some aged butlers, deaf and complaining, relics of the regime that M. Necker had overturned, who had followed his fortunes to Coppet in their embroidered liveries. The after-

[1] A Swiss man of letters, very intimate with Mme. de Staël. His letters to Frederika Brun are full of references to the circle at Coppet.

[2] Fréderic de Châteauvieux. Quoted in the Memoirs of the Duchesse d'Abrantés.

THE GRAND SALON AT COPPET

Photograph by Charnaux Frères of Geneva.

noon was also devoted to work until seven o'clock, when M. Necker's 1802
whist began. This whist was stormy; M. Necker and his daughter quarrelled, got angry, and quitted, swearing never to play with each other again, and began again the next evening. The remainder of the evening was devoted to conversation."

The accounts of Benjamin's part in these conversations vary, as his mood probably varied. One tells us that he talked little, another that his manner was to interject from time to time sharp, mocking comments. Again we hear of his "matchless conversation," so brilliant and eloquent that even "Corinne" was obliged to give him the floor and to allow him (a rare privilege) to finish his own sentences. Sainte-Beuve compares his encounters with the queen of conversationalists to a game of tennis, in which they sent back and forth, without once missing, the flying ball of their interwoven thought. It was not, he tells us, always serious or sentimental talk, but often mere gaiety and repartee. It was a sport, an art, a tournament, in which two of the keenest wits and cleverest tongues were so evenly matched that the listeners sat breathless, spellbound. But who shall evoke for us, out of dead records of Memoirs, the witchery of that wondrous flow which is so difficult to reproduce? Perhaps Constant's letters come nearer than any other testimony to giving some idea of his part in it. As for hers, one of her biographers has cleverly said that she talked so well that she made men fall in love with her, and then talked so much that she drove them away from her. But the many witticisms at her expense that her impetuosity and volubility provoked were, after all, the best tribute to the brilliancy which could not but make her the centre of every circle she entered.

The documents for the year that Benjamin spent in Switzerland are his letters to Claude Fauriel, who was at that time secretary to Fouché, Bonaparte's Minister of Police. An appreciation of Mme. de Staël's treatise on Literature, which Fauriel had written for the *Décade* in the spring of 1800, had made them acquainted, and the intimacy ripened through their many common literary interests. An intelligent acquaintance with foreign literature, such as any discussion of Mme. de Staël's book demanded, was rare in France at that time, and Fauriel and Constant were among the very few who were so qualified. Moreover, Fauriel's interest in primitive forms of literature, his studies into the origins of things, must have met an eager response from the historian of religions, and Benjamin's letters show how much he resorted

1802 to Fauriel's library for the latest English and German publications on India and Buddhism, and the value he set on Fauriel's criticisms and suggestions. "The inoculator of most of the distinguished spirits of his time," Sainte-Beuve calls him. Although five years younger than Benjamin, he was already distinguished in the field of letters, and the older man's appreciation of him is expressed in the following extract from a letter: "To speak in a manner worthy of your mind and your soul will, I believe, be a means of expressing my gratitude to you. I am proud of your sentiments for me, and this pride makes me of more worth and makes me desire to be worth more."

The intimacy went deeper than books and antiquities. To Fauriel, Benjamin revealed something of the sadness and perplexity which his connection with Mme. de Staël was bringing him. He was, moreover, a frequent guest in Fauriel's home, and witness, as a letter already quoted implies, of a felicity which could never be his. Fauriel had met the beautiful widow of Condorcet one day in the *Jardin des Plantes*, where they were both pursuing their favourite study of Botany, and in time what Guillois terms a *liaison discrète* (the English vocabulary is inadequate for the rendering of these delicate nuances) established itself between them. She was a Marquise, and, like Mme. de Staël, unwilling to renounce an illustrious name for one as yet unknown, but in 1802 Fauriel went to live with her in her house at Meulan, *La Maisonnette*. At this villa, which was built into the ruins of an old fortified château, and had inherited a tenth-century cloister and chapel from a convent founded there by Anne of Austria, Benjamin found a veritable paradise of bliss. He had known Mme. de Condorcet when a young man; they had sat beside each other at the Lycée, and his affection for Fauriel included her also. Her lovely flower garden on the ramparts of the old castle, and the celebrated view of the Seine from its terrace was associated with no such painful scenes as disturbed the shady paths of Coppet.

Although, as we have seen, Benjamin's departure from France had been purely voluntary as far as political reasons went, the displeasure of Bonaparte against Mme. de Staël was represented by Fouché to his secretary as including Benjamin, and Fauriel was advised by him to warn Constant to keep away from France for the present. The letters Benjamin wrote to Fauriel on the subject were full of protests, remonstrances and threats of defiance, messages to Fouché and promises of good behaviour in the seclusion of his estate, "absolutely alone"—that is, without Mme. de Staël—

if he could be permitted to revisit France and to attend to important 1803
business which demanded his presence. The vigilance of the police in inspecting private correspondence necessitated considerable obscurity in the allusions in these letters; dates are omitted, names altered and the letters directed under cover to a certain "tin-woman" at Meulan. "For some time," he wrote, "when I write letters, I am like M. Thomas—I consider that they are destined for the public eye, and if this continues, I think I shall be entirely able to print my private letters and keep my book in manuscript."

Notwithstanding his declaration that with or without permission he would be at his hermitage "before the first swallow," he continued to await an assurance that his return would be acceptable to the Government, giving all sorts of excuses for his delay. One of these delays was due to the death of his great-aunt, Mme. de Chandieu, at the age of ninety. "Benjamin has come to his aunt's funeral," Rosalie wrote Charles. "I shall be glad if he has reason to wear the costume of an heir. He thinks he will not, and I think the same." On the 6th of March she added that his legacy was small, 10,000 francs, and that he would not come to get it, as "his friend," who was "in great trouble on her father's account," . . . in order to detain him, "affects great unhappiness." In April he finally departed, writing Mme. de Nassau when leaving that the information had come which he had needed in order to return to his estate and to dispel the doubts of his friends at Coppet as to the fitness of his living in France. To Fauriel he protested that his precautions had been at the desire of his friends, for "Life is so burdensome in the regime under which we live that I cannot take much interest in avoiding dangers which do not threaten my life, and which, moreover, seem to me very improbable. . . . Take away from France you and a dozen men and women at the most, and I could resign myself to living anywhere else; and if, after a short sojourn near you. I see no possibility of repose, I shall try to get off with some books, and await the end of this reign in some peaceful retreat."

Before leaving for Switzerland, Benjamin had sold *Hérivaux*, and had purchased in its place a smaller estate in the same Department, between Maffliers and Franconville. *Les Herbages*,[1] as it was called, was a much more modest property than its predecessor,

[1] In the Commune of St. Martin du Tertre, a mile and a half from Luzarches. He had found his means insufficient to allow of his retaining Hérivaux.

1803 consisting of "a brook, woods and a field" and a "little peasant's hut." Nothing was lacking, he wrote Rosalie, to recall the primeval ages but innocence, love and youth. "Love is the only one of the three requisites that I can summon. As for innocence, it will have to be brought to me; as for youth, it would be vain to bring it to me: it would soon tire of me." A month after his return, he was quite at home, with four servants for his comfort and two horses for his pleasure, filling his days with reading, writing, riding and directing his workmen, with occasional visits from his friends in Paris; rising at four and retiring in good season, and running up to Paris,[1] which was only eight leagues away, every fortnight for a little diversion, but always returning to his solitude with satisfaction. The few neighbours, like himself new proprietors, whom he saw frequently in the afternoons or at dinner, were sufficiently commonplace people to afford a pleasant contrast to the effervescent *esprit* of Coppet, and now, as so often before and after, he resolved never to re-enter public life, never again to be tied to anybody, to live far from people, and to allow nothing to disturb his scholarly tranquillity. The irony of his whole restless, contentious life is in these words to Rosalie: "I should like to shun the struggle which I foresee, to take root here, physically, like my trees. All wandering about is odious to me, and the thought of it makes me sick." [2]

But this solitude was soon disturbed. When bound, as he was, to an uneasy spirit like Mme. de Staël's, it was useless to make plans for the future. Her father said that she reminded him of the Indian nomads, who broke up their camp in the morning without knowing where they would find shelter at night. On the pretext that her children must come to France to be educated, she persisted in returning against orders, and rented a small house near Constant, at Maffliers. In addition to this act of insubordination, Napoleon's dislike of her had been increased by her latest novel, *Delphine*. This novel, which had appeared in Switzerland the preceding autumn, had made such a stir that Roederer wrote in his journal that no one in Paris went to the theatre any more because everybody was at home reading *Delphine*. Its rebellion

[1] He had lodgings at Hôtel Vauban, 306 rue St. Honoré.

[2] "Once settled down to the cultivation of my land, I shall leave again only to make some long journey. I am tired of all but my cabin, and if I permit myself to make my bed away from home, it will be in order to go and observe closely the institutions of America and the administration of Jefferson. For woods and streams, and men, I can find the two first at home; for the last, it is necessary to cross the ocean." (To Fauriel, February 14, 1803.)

against arbitrary conventionalities and social prejudices, and its 1803
reflections on the institution of divorce were particularly obnoxious to the Emperor, who was on the point of divorcing Josephine. Anticipating trouble, Benjamin had already sent a copy of it to Fauriel, asking what effect he thought it would have, especially upon Fouché, at the same time disclaiming for it any connection with his own situation. The theme of the book was evidently inspired by Mme. de Staël's unhappy marriage, and society at once recognized in Henri de Lebensei, who had married a divorced woman—in consequence of which they were both ostracized—Benjamin Constant as Mme. de Staël saw him. Although his relation to the plot of *Delphine* is unimportant, his character is the most elaborately drawn of any in the book, and bears evidence of having been separately written and incorporated in the novel afterwards, and it is worth while to quote from it here, because we have so very few records of this intimacy from Mme. de Staël's point of view:

"He dressed and looked like an Englishman, nothing remarkable in his appearance except its distinction, its nobility and its intelligent expression. . . . The more I conversed with him, the more I admired the extent and the force of his mentality, and the more I felt that no character corresponded so well to mine. . . .

"From that day to this, for six years, far from reproaching myself for loving Henri de Lebensei, it has always seemed to me that if I put him away from me I should be rejecting a special favour of Providence, the most manifest mark of his protection, the friend who restored to me the use of my natural faculties, and leads me on the path of order, of morality and of happiness. . . . A woman told me that this Frenchman was supposed to be unsociable, a scholar and a philosopher. . . . She added that he had studied at Cambridge. Henri de Lebensei is certainly the most remarkable man, intellectually, that it is possible to find; a serious, strenuous education has given him an unlimited acquaintance with philosophical subjects, and a lively imagination inspires him with original opinions on all the facts he has gathered up. He enjoys conversing with me the more because a timidity—shyness and pride—renders him often silent in company. . . . The more the circle narrows, the more he displays his conversational charm and resources, and alone with me he is even more delightful than he ever shows himself with others. He keeps for me the treasures of thought and of virtue which the ordinary man spreads before many listeners. . . . His opinions are quite independent; he is contemptuous of men in general, although he is very tolerant of individuals. . . . Under a cold and often stern exterior he is more

1803 open to pity than any one I know; he hides this secret lest it be abused." [1]

It is to be noted that in the first period of his life Benjamin drifted; in this second period, he was led or driven; and not until the last fifteen years of his life did he develop the initiative which insured definite accomplishment. Although he had long contemplated a period of quiet study in the libraries of Germany, it was not until Mme. de Staël, being urgently requested to remove herself again from French soil, determined to visit that country, that he realized his desires. Yet it seems that, after all, he went unwillingly. Mme. de Staël says in her *Dix Années d'Exil* that although he "generously offered" to accompany her, since she spoke little or no German, and he could be useful to her in so many ways, she "suffered from the sacrifice" he was making for her. He went protesting indignantly against the injustice of Napoleon, which he compared to that of Augustus against Ovid, and declaring that this exile of a "writer who had consecrated her whole life in the defence of noble thoughts, was an infamous blot on the history of the Emperor."

On the journey, which was made by way of Chalons-sur-Marne and Metz (where they stopped to await Necker's sanction to the trip) her dejection was relieved by Benjamin's "astonishing conversation," and she wrote De Gérando [2] that but for him she would have succumbed to her grief over her exile. Their stay at Metz, where they were the guests of the prefect of the Moselle, Count Colchem, was enlivened by considerable gaiety, soirées, dinners, fêtes—for he was in the train of a lady of wide celebrity—and by the meeting with Charles Villers. This lovable and brilliant man, although born in the Duchy of Lorraine before its union to France, was of French ancestry. He had begun life as a soldier, and being in France at the outbreak of the Revolution, had at first espoused the Revolutionary cause, but later, repelled by its brutality and lawlessness, he wrote a book against it, for which he was banished.

[1] *Delphine*, part ii. lettre 7. It is interesting to compare this portrait with that of Oswald in *Corinne*, which is also thought to be drawn, in some respects, from Benjamin, and which was written after their "incompatibility" had begun to make itself felt. "At twenty-five he was disgusted with life; his mind estimated everything beforehand, and his wounded sensibility no longer enjoyed the illusions of the heart; . . . nothing caused him a sensation of pleasure, not even the good that he accomplished."

[2] A French philanthropist and philosopher of such wide interests that Sainte-Beuve compared him to a piece of macaroni "which stretches and never breaks."

He then became a student and won the friendship of the great 1804
German scholars and poets of his time. In 1801 he wrote a book which introduced the philosophy of Kant to the French people, and was in return appointed Professor of French Literature in the University of Göttingen, where Benjamin later continued the acquaintance with him begun at this time. After the events of the Napoleonic wars had broken off the friendly relations of the French and the Germans, Villers, by one of those "cruel injustices that wars engender," was deprived of his professorship, and Benjamin was active in trying to get him reinstated, but without success. At the time of this meeting in Metz, Villers was accompanied by a Frau Von Rodde, daughter of a German professor—another of those *liaisons discrètes*, apparently—whom Mme. de Staël called a "fat German whose charms I have not yet detected." The rivalry between these two women for the attentions of Villers afforded much amusement to Benjamin; but when they met five years afterwards in Göttingen, the spell of the "fat German" was still unbroken.

From Metz the voyagers proceeded to Frankfort, where they were entertained by the banker Bethmann,[1] and here, for some reason, Benjamin left Mme. de Staël and started to return to France, but was summoned back almost immediately by the illness of her little daughter, to whom he was greatly attached, with scarlet fever. He ended by going on to Weimar with her, although, as he stopped to visit the library at Göttingen on the way, he did not appear in Weimar until the 20th of January—a whole month after Mme. de Staël burst upon the horizon of that community of intellectuals.

They had not selected an opportune time to visit the Athens of modern Europe, for a cloud of sadness rested upon it. Klopstock had recently died, Herder lay at the point of death, Schiller was nervous and half-sick with the work upon his new drama, *Wilhelm Tell*, ("and now the devil brings me this philosophizing French woman," he wrote), and Goethe had grown old and morose

[1] In the apocryphal volume, *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, is an entertaining narrative of a meeting between Goethe's mother and the travellers, at a large assembly at the Bethmanns', where the *Frau Rath* appeared "decked out in tricoloured plumes" in honour of the strangers. "The long-expected one came towards them through a series of brightly lighted rooms," dressed as Corinne, in an orange and blue turban, twirling in her fingers her usual twig of laurel, and accompanied by Benjamin. But neither Benjamin nor Mme. de Staël were in Frankfort at this time (August 1808) when the scene is described as taking place.

1804 and averse to meeting strangers. Mme. de Staël's reputation had preceded her, and every one was afraid of her volubility and her insatiable thirst for knowledge. "The anthill was disturbed in its usual occupations," says Lady Blennerhasset, her biographer. So the Gods sulked and refused to come forth. Goethe fled to Jena, and Schiller took care not to be visible.[1] No wonder that Mme. de Staël thought Weimar less like a small town than a big castle!

Northern Germany in 1804 was almost an undiscovered country to the French. A story is told of a Frenchman of that day who, asked if the Germans had a language of their own, replied, "No, they speak a *patois*, but they understand each other." Lessing, Kant, Fichte and Schiller were scarcely more than names in France until after the publication of Mme. de Staël's *Littérature*, and even so cultivated a woman as she was, had but a slight knowledge of the language, so that when Goethe sent her a copy of his *Wilhelm Meister*, she was only able to admire its beautiful binding; which, Benjamin laughingly assured her, was better than he could do, although he had read it! German disapprobation of what the Revolution had accomplished, or rather failed to accomplish, had widened the gulf between the two nations. French "explosiveness," French "materialism," French "lack of æsthetic and poetic feeling," shocked the Germans, and the Olympians were disposed to regard with a mixture of condescension and curiosity this visitation of Mme. de Staël "hurled among them from the summits of French culture from a totally different world." Her strange, exotic style of dress, her masculine appearance, and her exuberant, insistent manner, excited more amazement than admiration. Their letters bristle with exclamatory allusions to her. "She takes all the poetry out of me," cried poor Schiller, when at last he consented to meet her.

Amid the excitement occasioned by Mme. de Staël, Benjamin's arrival attracted little attention. He came, as has been said, on the 20th of January, and the following night he no doubt attended the first performance of Goethe's *Clavigo* at the Hof-theater. As Goethe was the foremost philosophical and literary figure of that time, the event most coveted by a newcomer to Weimar would naturally be a meeting with the great man, and the opportunity came a few days after Benjamin arrived, when, Goethe having consented to come out of his Jena retreat, he drove with

[1] But afterwards Goethe wrote (*Annals*): "Let us bless that inconvenient visit, which happened so unseasonably and so undesirably."

Mme. de Staël to call upon the great man by appointment. At 1804
this interview the lady naturally held the floor. The difference between French and German poetry was the topic of the conversation, which lasted one hour. It is probable that Benjamin remained in the background, and made but slight impression upon Goethe at this first interview. On his part, the first judgment was not entirely favourable. "I have seen Goethe," he wrote in his Journal.[1] "Subtlety, vanity, almost painful physical irritability, remarkable *esprit*, a beautiful expression, a somewhat delapidated appearance, there is his portrait." We have an account of the meeting by Biedermann,[2] which represents Constant as beginning, immediately upon his introduction to Goethe, "in the style of a true Frenchman, to load him with flattery, saying that the world was marvelling at the stupendous productions of his genius, that he had secured for himself immortal fame, etc. etc."

"Goethe turned his large fiery eyes upon Constant, and replied, 'I know it, I know all that; I know too that the world regards me as a carpenter who has built a ship of the first class, upon a mountain, thousands of miles from the ocean; but the water will rise, my ship will float, and bear her builder in triumph where human genius never reached before.'"

Constant's verdict as to his vanity would seem from this report to have been fairly justified, but Goethe had very shrewdly voiced the thoughts which were actually passing through his visitor's mind. Trained as he was in the clear, definite thought of the Encyclopædists, sheathed, moreover, in the intense Protestantism of his Swiss forbears, Benjamin had little sympathy for the mixture of æstheticism and Catholicism with science. "What a pity that the philosophical mysticism of Germany has carried him away!" he exclaimed. "Why go on from that to religious ideas? And, what is worse, Catholicism? Because, they say, Catholicism is more poetical. And Goethe said, 'I would rather that Catholicism should do harm than that I should be prevented from making use of it to make my work interesting.'" Of the *Elective Affinities*, Benjamin wrote, "The abuse of analogy occurs often in Goethe, and above all in his attempts at chemistry and the exact sciences." While in Weimar, he read *Faust*, and thought it a "travesty on

[1] The *Journal Intime* (published portions) begins with his arrival in Weimar. It is chiefly occupied with his residence there, and later in Göttingen, with his struggles to free himself from Mme. de Staël, his courtship of Charlotte and his infatuation for Mme. Récamier.

[2] *Gesprache*, cited by Cogswell, *Life and Letters*, p. 53.

1804 the human race and on all scientific people." "The Germans see unspeakable profundity in it, but for my part I think it is inferior to *Candide*; it is quite as immoral, barren and disenchanting, and has less lightness of touch and clever wit, and is in much worse taste." This is a distinctly Gallic judgment and shows how completely French he was in his literary and scientific standards. M. Fernand Baldensperger, who has written a brilliant study of the intellectual contrast between the two men, says that some French critics regard Faust as the supreme expression of poetical madness, of intellectual chaos; and in regard to Constant's criticism of *Elective Affinities*, he cites Stendhal as the only Frenchman of the early nineteenth century who was able to grasp Goethe's idea, which he applied in *Rouge et Noir*.

Goethe at once perceived that they would never see things from the same standpoint. The philosophy on which Constant's convictions rested was, in his estimation, purely a convention and a system cut and dried. Their attitudes were as unlike as their temperaments. Goethe thought Constant talked "like a Gallic Jupiter," but he did justice to the fairness and clearness of his opponent's mind when he said:

"If it was not possible for him to consider and treat correctly my method and manner, my nature and my art; still the way in which he endeavoured to make them honestly his own, in order to bring them closer to his own conceptions, was of the greatest assistance even to me, because he set before me whatever undeveloped ideas, cloudy conceptions, inexpressible principles and impracticable designs had been allowed to remain in my exposition."[1]

"I spent many instructive evenings with Benjamin Constant," Goethe wrote in his *Annals*. Sometimes they walked together, or met at dinners, or at the palace, where the Duke and Duchess entertained the French visitors most cordially, or at the theatre, or at Goethe's house. Their conversation dealt with literary and philosophical themes, or æsthetics, such as Pausanias' description of a picture by Polygnotus, representing the descent of Ulysses into hell, into which the writer had instilled a moral element the picture did not, or could not, convey. Or they discussed the geography of the Ancients, or *Werther*, which the future author

[1] From Haas, *Constant's Gesprache mit Goethe*, Euphorion vi. p. 521. Haas also quotes the following from a letter of Schiller (January 8, 1804): "I have heard nothing from Frau von Staël. I hope she is occupied with Benjamin Constant."

of *Adolphe* criticized as depicting weakness rather than strength 1804
—a criticism which was one day to be passed upon his own romance! Goethe's reply to this was that the art of the thing was his sole concern, that the effect on the public did not interest him—a pagan attitude that shocked Constant, with whom the public counted for considerable. But although he admired and deferred to Goethe, Benjamin never materially altered his first judgment of him as lacking in wit, in depth, in originality, with an *esprit* that was somewhat fantastic, and with less *bonhomie* in him than any one he had ever met. He confessed to a sense of constraint in conversing with him, which he attributed in part to the suspicion with which all foreigners regarded a Frenchman in those days, even though he might not be in sympathy with his Government. Goethe, too, was conscious of the difficulties which might arise at that time, when the "weightiest events and occurrences were the order of the day," and found that his collection of fifteenth-century medals was a perfectly safe and neutral channel into which to divert the conversation from delicate questions which threatened to disturb the harmony of their interviews. Although he confessed that he failed to discover the signs of the future statesman in this "tall, reserved young travelling companion" of Mme. de Staël, he bestows upon him at the close of his *Annals* a eulogy that might well serve for the final refutation of Constant's enemies and critics: "Whoever recollects what this excellent man accomplished in after years, and with what zeal he advanced without wavering along the path which, once chosen, was for ever followed, realizes what noble aspirations, as yet undeveloped, were fermenting within him."

For each of the Weimar celebrities whom he met at Goethe's or at the Court (that Court which Anatole France has called the "Banquet of the Muses"), Constant has one of his keen, concise characterizations. Wieland had "a French intellect" and was cold as a philosopher—as a poet, trivial; "interesting, but a great agnostic." Schiller he dismissed as a man of *esprit* in his special line, "*but* almost solely a poet."[1] His drama, *Wilhelm Tell*, from which the author read two scenes at a soirée at his house, to which Benjamin was invited, was "like a confused magic lantern, but with many more beautiful scenes than his other plays possess." Böttiger had extraordinary learning and good sense, but lacked

[1] Schiller said that, had Venus understood French, Constant would have held her against Bacchus and Mars. (Cited in an article by Junius Brown, *Lippincott*, Oct. 1874.)

1804 taste, and was encumbered by his knowledge. Müller, the historian, was lively and *spirituel,* full of conceit, but rather a good fellow. Schelling he met at Wurzburg—" A little gentleman, with his nose in the air ; his eye earnest, sharp, quick ; his smile bitter, a dry voice ; speaking little, listening with an attention that does not flatter, giving the impression of a peevish nature ; a mixture of French conceit and German metaphysics."

The German ladies were " insipid." One of them, a " Mme. Schac, . . ." a " widow beginning to take notice," had a " poor heart bound to a body already faded, which beat its poor little wings without being able to disengage itself from its fetters and without inspiring any other sentiment than that of pity." This poor heart appears to have been offered to him, but he took his adieux of her " tenderly and respectfully," and quite unmelted. " Yet the time will come when I myself will have no more such offers," he reflected. The Dowager Duchess,[1] with whom he supped " gaily and lengthily " was more enlivening, but the type of women he encountered in Weimar inspired very unchivalrous sentiments.

" That which constitutes what are called *femmes d'esprit* " [he writes in his Journal] " is agitation without object. They are wholly a social creation, and consequently artificial. As long as there is a certain amount of good looks, that passes them ; a little physical interest sustains and wins indulgence for the useless and fruitless agitation of their moral natures. But after middle life women are not adapted for society. The rôle of friend remains to them, but of friend in retirement, receiving confidences and giving advice to the man, with whom they rank as the second or third interest in life. . . . A sad lot is that of women ! It is certain that for their happiness an almost Oriental seclusion would be better than the state of semi-independence that we permit them. After they are thirty, of what service is their liberty to them, if they can only offer what no one wants ? "

This frankly cynical presentation of the woman question comes oddly from the admirer of Barbet at forty-seven, the lover of Charlotte Marenholz when she was far past the age limit, the worshipper of Mme. Récamier when only her beauty remained to " pass " her. Mme. de Staël was already long past thirty. Was it of her " fruitless agitations " that he was thinking when this bitter mood was upon him, or did he only refer to the German *Hofdamen* who paid court to the Olympians of Weimar ?

Crabb Robinson was in Weimar at this time, and Constant

[1] Princess Anne Amalie of Brunswick, daughter of Duke Charles of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel and mother of Charles-Auguste, the reigning Duke.

enjoyed drawing him out on his pet theme of "art for art's sake." 1804
They met again ten years later in Paris, at a dinner at Mme. de Staël's, when Constant commended Goethe's *Dictung und Wahrheit* to the Englishman whom he had had the honour of introducing to Goethe in the Hof-theater. In his *Reminiscences* Robinson speaks of Constant as being "by far the most distinguished" of those he had met in the company of Mme. de Staël.

"The slanderous world, at least in France, has always affected to consider him her lover. . . . It would never have occurred to me. She appeared to be the elder, and called him 'Mon Benjamin' as she might have done a son or younger brother. He, on the other hand, never spoke of her lightly, but always with respect, as 'Mme. de Staël.' At her table he occupied the place of the master of the house; he was quite the *ami de la maison.* The worst thing about him was that he was separated from his wife, to whom he is said to have been a bad husband. . . . In saying that his tone towards Mme. de Staël was respectful rather than tender, I do not mean that it was deferential towards her opinions. On the contrary, his opposition was unsparing, and though he had not her colloquial eloquence, I thought he had always the advantage of her in argument. One remark on the French national character made by him is worth quoting. I inquired whether Bonaparte really possessed the affections of the French people. He said: 'Certainly not. But the French,' he added, 'are so vain, that they cannot bear the insignificance of neutrality, and will affect to belong to the triumphant party from an unwillingness to confess that they belong to the conquered.'"

Crabb Robinson was an Englishman, and therefore a little curious about the relation of these illustrious travelling companions, as well as slightly shocked at Benjamin's matrimonial mishap. Weimar, however, was too well seasoned to exchanged wives and outrages of Hymen in the circle of the elect to ask any questions. Böttiger,[1] to be sure, with whom Benjamin became

[1] An archæologist, director of the Gymnasium at Weimar. From there he went to Dresden, as director of the Ritter Akademie and of the Museum of Antiquities. His knowledge of mythology was of great assistance to Constant, whose letters to him are in the Dresden Library. He describes Constant's conversation as consisting in a "certain ironical dryness, or dry irony, wherein he seems to interpret a thing quite otherwise from what it actually is. His whole exterior favours this attitude. He has a long, lean figure, with rather prominent cheek-bones, but with an appearance of youth. He wears spectacles everywhere, and peers through them as if he were half masquerading." Constant's letters to him have been edited by M. Baldensperger.

1804 intimate to the point of confidences, believed he had authority for the assertion that Mme. de Staël's love for her friend was of the " purest," and that Benjamin was ready to sacrifice everything for her, even to the extent of renouncing all pretensions to her hand, " could a man be found who would make her perfectly happy."

But Benjamin did not allow social distractions to divert him from the opportunity now afforded for him to advance his studies for his book. The Duke Augustus, who had known his father, and who received him like an old friend, gave him the freedom of his library for his researches. Weimar seemed the one little oasis where literature and scholarship might still be cultivated, amid a whole continent kindling into war. Benjamin's admiration for German scholarship dated from the Brunswick days when he horrified Mme. de Charrière by writing her of his conclusion that the Germans were " infinitely superior to the French or English " as philosophers ; " more learned, more impartial, more exact—a trifle more diffuse, it is true, but almost always just, true, courageous." He made an exception of their poets—lyric, tragic, comic—but that was because, as he frankly avowed, he did not like poetry in any language. As France became more and more materialized in her struggle for political and social stability, Germany came to stand with him for scholarly ideals. " You cannot imagine how Germany rests the mind and the soul," he wrote Fauriel from Weimar, " or, at least, you can imagine it, for I am sure that those who have the liveliest conception of Paradise are the inhabitants of Hell." In spite of the metaphysical vagaries of her poet-philosophers, the great liberality of her literary men and the impartiality and good sense he found in Weimar, even among the " laity," impressed him. " How many ideas which are but slightly circulated in France are accepted and become common property in Germany," he exclaimed. " Above all is this true of religion." As for scholarship, the French had much to learn here also. A Frenchman writing a book, he said, thought it unnecessary to cite sources, or, if he did so, referred only to French authorities. Only in Germany was there the exact sort of scholarship which he desired to use in preparing his book. To his aunt he wrote :

" I have been delighted with my journey to Germany. I have met here men who are solely occupied with letters, and derive from them a real happiness. If a continental war does not come again to upset this part of the continent entirely, Germany will

expand and leave France far behind her ; and if certain conditions 1804
continue, it will perhaps be in Germany that a new Fatherland must be sought." (To Mme. de Nassau, February 27, 1804.)

When, seven years later, Benjamin actually made the experiment of transplanting his sympathies and interests to a more scholarly atmosphere than that offered by France under the Empire, he soon found that stupidity and bigotry and jealousies flourished quite as much in the shadow of a big German university as in the selfishness of political rivalries or the limitations of a small community in Switzerland. At present the lure of the German libraries, which were especially rich in the materials he needed for his book, blinded him to much in the German life and temperament that he later thought unendurable.

On the 9th of March, Goethe wrote to Knebel : " If you could send Constant to me, you would do me a great service ; where does the worthy man keep himself now ? " Benjamin had left Weimar for a visit to the Library of Leipsic, and had found the solitude of a strange city and the 80,000 volumes of its library so seductive that he was tempted to settle down there for a period of work. He met some of the famous professors of the University —Dufour, Eschard, Platner, Canes—and purchased some German books. Something changed his mind about remaining there, however—possibly it was the letter from Mme. de Staël which drew from him the comment in his Journal, " There is nothing so good, so affectionate and so devoted as a woman "—and he went back to Weimar. When, soon after his return, Mme. de Staël started on her journey to Berlin, where she was to pass a season of festivities and entertainments in which he had no desire to participate, he decided to return to Switzerland, but with every intention of returning the following winter to this " Paradise of the Muses." Before he saw Germany again, that upheaval of whose possibility he had written his aunt had occurred. The wars of Napoleon had brought havoc and ruin upon the little Duchy which had seemed so remote from the commotion that was menacing the strong nations. Weimar had been forced into the Confederation of the Rhine ; its resources had been drained to meet the war indemnity ; its rulers were heart-broken ; death and old age had quenched the genius that made it famous ; the great luminaries of Weimar had ceased to shine.

Benjamin travelled southward by way of Gotha, where he dined with numerous friends, among others, the Hereditary Prince

1804 of that Duchy, and by Frankfort, where he attended a performance of *Emilia Galotti*. He stopped at Ulm to see his old friends, the Hubers. As was sometimes his habit when travelling, he bought a dog to keep him company, but in spite of this new friend, and of the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides which he devoured on the way, he reached Switzerland in a state of deep depression, the result of illness, bad roads and bad weather. The first news he received upon his arrival was of the serious illness of Mme. de Staël's father. On the 9th of April, Necker was dead.

CHAPTER XII

NEW INTERESTS

(1804–1807)

CONSTANT'S visit to Weimar had revived his literary ambitions, and now that the way to a political career seemed hopelessly blocked, he was inclined to make a long sojourn in Germany, pursuing further researches for his *History of Religions* in the fine Library of Leipsic, and settling down in the congenial and inspiring literary milieu at Weimar for serious study and writing. The death of Necker, which for a time prostrated Mme. de Staël with grief, interfered with the carrying out of this plan for the present, since the "Trop Célèbre" required the constant attendance of all her friends to distract her from her sorrow. Nevertheless, he continued under the Weimar spell, and literary interests were destined to supplant political theorizing for several years to come. 1804

Mme. de Staël had brought a new lion home with her from Germany, August Wilhelm Schlegel,[1] whom, at the suggestion of Goethe, she had engaged in Berlin as a tutor for her children. The conversation of this learned gentleman, whom Benjamin thought a pedant, but who assumed the direction of Mme. de Staël's studying and reading, quite as much as of her children's, served to divert the ardour of the company at Coppet from the dangerous topic of politics to that of letters and philosophy. Benjamin's thoughts were busy with his own studies of religious history, and he wearied of discussions in which he was obliged to be merely a listener. Rosalie, who saw him there, thought him looking ill and behaving like a spoiled child. He could not, moreover, sympathize with Schlegel's philosophical views.

"The entire philosophy of the Schlegels," he wrote in the Journal,

[1] A German philosopher, active in the Romantic movement. He lectured in Berlin and translated foreign classics into German. In 1805 he wrote a work on the Decadence of Religion.

1804 "is a purely personal affair which they honour with the name of philosophy. They declare for Catholicism because some Protestant philosophers ridiculed them. They do not like governments where there is liberty of the press because the press profits by it to write against them." He sat up half the night, nearly dead with sleep and with the pain in his eyes, listening to the "reciprocal panegyrics" of Schlegel and Mme. de Staël. "This evening ended in a discussion between Mme. de Staël and Schlegel on *esprit* in conversation. Strange mania, to wish to educate the teacher! It is very stupid for the audience to see them settled opposite each other, Schlegel praising himself for his scorn of society, and she praising herself for her *esprit* in conversation."

The bustle of guests at Coppet, the endless entertainments devised for Mme. de Staël's distraction, and her excitable condition played havoc with Benjamin's nerves, as the candle-light did with his eyes. There was a continual coming and going of strangers at the big château, and Rosalie was scandalized at the way Necker's daughter paraded her grief, making it an excuse.

"to give fêtes to the Duchesse de Courlande, whom she met in Berlin, and to keep open house at Coppet for all the German and Genevese scholars she can collect, who engage in prodigious fencing-matches of wit and wisdom, until it is a relief to meet a person who talks commonplace." (To Charles, October 20, 1804.)

It would be unjust to say that Mme. de Staël's grief for her father was superficial; but her ability to give it free emotional expression was a great aid to its endurance. When one of her sons was killed in a duel, Byron observed that, of course, she would suffer as any mother must, but that she would do what few mothers could, "write an essay upon it." So now, having summoned all her friends to her side—Bonstetten, Sismondi, Mathieu de Montmorency and Benjamin—she set to work upon her father's biography.[1] She gave part of it to Benjamin to read, and he was deeply affected by it. "The emotion in it is the more vivid," he wrote in his Journal, "as it is entirely free from affectation. Will they ridicule it in Paris? I am writing down my impression of it here so that it may not be changed." To this opinion he remained loyal; he wrote the preface for it, and always spoke

[1] Published posthumously in 1818, with Constant's *Notice* of her death, written for his paper, the *Mercure*, as an introduction.

of it as her best work. His own respect and admiration for 1804
Necker, in spite of all the abuse and ridicule heaped on him by a fickle and ungrateful world, was undiminished by any differences in their political views—differences which had greatly modified, on Necker's part, in the last years. "He was of so lofty a character, of such delicacy of spirit, of such just sentiments, and had such a generous scorn of what is low, that it will be difficult to fill his place," Benjamin wrote to Mme. de Condorcet.

In November Mme. de Staël set out on that celebrated trip to Italy which produced *Corinne*. "What is she going to do there," asked Rosalie, "unless she takes the place of the Pope?" She was accompanied by Schlegel and by Sismondi,[1] who wanted to complete his study of the History of the Italian Republics. Although Benjamin was urged to join the party, he seized the opportunity to escape, and pleaded the desire to return to Weimar and to the pursuit of the studies which had been interrupted. But after bidding them farewell at Lyons, where he went for the sake of visiting the Library, his mood changed suddenly, and, going to Les Herbages with the intention of staying only three weeks, he suffered a return of his habitual inertia. "My room was warm and my bed was good. I remained!" Instead of proceeding to Germany he began to unpack his books and papers, and settled down to study under the coveted but rare privilege of solitude. But as usual he soon tired of seclusion, and of the "winter solitude of a dead and stripped and barren country where the wind whistles, and where the ground is hard and frozen," and he fled to Paris. There he found a congenial circle of literary friends, some of whom he had not met since the days of the Directoire. They dined together regularly at a café, and he was the leading spirit of the group.

Bonaparte was engaged in schemes which led to the overthrow of Liberty and the creation of the Empire, and, politically, Benjamin had committed suicide long before, so that the company in which he now found himself was wholly literary in its interests. Villers, who was in Paris, was still burdened with Frau Rodde, but was full of enthusiasm of the kind that Benjamin needed to stimulate him to real work. To him he owed the inspiration to contribute a series of articles on German literature and philosophy for the *Bibliothèque Germanique* which the Institut was bringing out. Like many other things that Benjamin began,

[1] A Genevese scholar and historian who lived opposite Coppet, on Lake Geneva.

1805 these articles were never completed, but the interest they aroused brought him in touch with several young men of Villers's circle, such as Hochet, Pescatory and Barante. Hochet, whom he had known in the days of the Directoire, as the leader of the *Jeunesse Dorée*, was now collaborating with Suard on the *Publiciste*. Prosper de Barante was the son of the prefect of Geneva who had befriended Mme. de Staël in her evasions of Bonaparte's police, and who was finally removed on that account. Benjamin had already met the younger Barante at Coppet, but the intimacy did not develop until this winter, for when Mme. de Staël was on her throne she monopolized every one. Their literary tastes were the bond between the two men, and Barante often accompanied Constant to Les Herbages, where they passed whole days together in *tête-à-tête*, walking in the forest of L'Isle-Adam, and discussing literature and life. The better he knew Constant, the more enchanting did Barante find him, for he threw off his natural reserve, and revealed his extraordinary powers and attractions only to those who, like Barante, put him at his ease, and shared his sympathies and ideals. In his *Souvenirs*, Barante testifies to the great erudition, the subtlety of judgment, the lively imagination, the childlike gaiety, the noble and generous emotions, the pity and devotion to all suffering and misfortune, which he discovered in the man who passed in the world for a trifler, a cynic and a libertine. With that youthful spirit of *camaraderie*, which made him in after years the idol of the younger men in the Liberal party, he annihilated the fifteen years of difference in their ages, and met Barante on his own ground. His tender-heartedness, perhaps because it was least expected from a man of his reputed wit, impressed Barante particularly. " Perhaps the only misfortune that did not evoke his pity was that of stupidity. With pretentious, silly people he knew no mercy, and let fly all the arrows of his cutting wit. . . . He excelled in ridiculing vulgar people. He let them do all the talking, put them at their ease, and knew how to draw out all their follies, their vanities, or their interested motives, and repeated in parody all they had admitted, without the poor mediocre creatures ever suspecting it."

If it is true, as Herriot thinks, that Barante supplanted Constant in the affections of Mme. de Staël during their sojourn at Auxerre in the summer of 1806, at least this did not affect their friendship, and some of Benjamin's best letters are those which he wrote to Barante from Göttengen. Their common conviction that their own ideals and theories were far in advance of their age

bound them closely together, and Barante's *réserve animée*, as 1805
Mme. de Staël phrased his discretion of judgment, was an excellent balance for Benjamin's tendency to caprice in his enthusiasms. He stands in the literary movement of his age with those who, like Constant and Mme. de Staël, felt the turn of the tide (to borrow an expression of Sainte-Beuve's) and, without discarding the old ideas, were able to transform them to fit the needs of the new age.

Political differences destroyed these pleasant relations in after years. Barante never forgave Constant for deserting the fine sentiments of *L'Esprit de Conquête*, and going over to Bonaparte's camp in the Cent Jours, nor for a bitter attack upon himself when he was Directeur des Contributions. " We met, but we did not try to meet," was his comment on their relations after that time. Yet Barante visited Constant in his last illness, and to him Benjamin wrote almost his last letter, expressing regret for not having been well enough to see him, and begging him to come again.

Besides his own little coterie, Benjamin also saw from time to time, during this winter of 1804–5, Camille Jordan, who had returned from exile in 1800, de Gérando, Suard and Biot, the distinguished mathematician and astronomer. Biot was a member of the Institut, and at his house Benjamin, who aspired to membership in that august body himself, met a set of people with whom he was conscious of feeling more at home than in the political circles. " That is where my tastes and interests call me, but this devilish politics separates me from them." At Biot's, he made the acquaintance of Alexander Humboldt, and admired him exceedingly, although in his opinion Humboldt lacked the " backbone " to attain the universality to which he aspired. " He is a man who has engaged in a superb undertaking, who has executed it with admirable perseverance, who will render a very interesting account of it, and who will advance along several lines of science."

Constant was an occasional guest in the salon of Mme. Sophie Gay which became so celebrated under Louis Philippe, but the conversation there seemed to him as insipid as that of the ladies of Weimar ; " one would have supposed them to be corpses who had kept the habit of talking." The soirées of Mme. de Pourrat, mother of his old sweetheart, were no less tedious, and Jenny herself, now married, appeared rude and brusque to his more mature observation. At Mme. de Condorcet's he was more in his element, with his friend Fauriel and with Baggesen, the

1805 Danish poet, with whom he could discuss German scholarship. And at Mme. Récamier's he made the acquaintance of his future colleague in the Chamber of Deputies, General Sebastiani, "foppish, cold, full of those generalizations which the so-called Machiavellists of the day adopt as truths." Mme. Récamier, who was one day to disturb his heart and his head so fatally, as yet made no perceptible impression upon him.

Just at present his gallantries were directed toward two other ladies, one of whom was a Mrs. Lindsay whom Chateaubriand described in his Memoirs as "*Un Esprit dur*," possessing "nobility of soul and loftiness of character." She had not a very presentable past—the last of the Nînons, she was called by Chateaubriand, who had known her in London when, as the mistress of a distinguished *émigré*, she had a salon much frequented by Royalist celebrities. Barante thought he recognized her in Constant's novel, *Adolphe*, and she is said to have been immensely flattered to have been taken for Ellénore, even while disclaiming the honour. Benjamin disclaimed it too, and more emphatically. "This woman has a great deal of vanity; I never thought of her," he wrote to Mme. Récamier.

Although he may have flirted with Mrs. Lindsay, Benjamin's serious concern this winter was with the sorrows of a very lovely woman to whom he was genuinely and deeply attached, and who was slowly dying of consumption. A large part of his time was devoted to cheering and amusing her last months of life. Julie Talma,[1] the divorced wife of the great tragedian, was the natural child of a wealthy man who had bequeathed her a large fortune. As a dancer she had never attained fame, but after her marriage to Talma, who was younger than she, she had espoused the Girondist cause, and many of the leaders of the Gironde were her guests in her sumptuous hotel on the rue de Chantereine. While Talma, who was not fond of society, fell asleep at her splendid dinners, she was developing her enthusiasm for the Revolution in the society of Condorcet, Narbonne, Roland, Riouffe and de Ségur, and charming all who met her by her *esprit*, her grace and her lovely character. But Talma fell in love with a famous actress, and Julie, having divorced him, went to live with Mme. de Con-

[1] Baroness Nolde found among the archives from which she drew the letters of Mme. de Staël to Benjamin (which were published in 1907, in English) a package of unsigned letters to him in a woman's hand, which are believed to be from Julie Talma. Her promise to publish them has not been fulfilled as far as we can learn.

dorcet. Her sons inherited from her a frail constitution, and all 1805
died within three years. In nursing the last one, she contracted his disease and survived him but a short time. With the optimism that accompanies this disease, she refused to believe that her end was near, and continued to plan for her future; and it was through the last trying weeks, when she was sinking, that Benjamin was in daily attendance upon her. She had a wonderful capacity for strong friendships, and he has made her the subject of a very beautiful Memoir which was published in his *Mélanges de Littérature et de Politique*, twenty-four years after her death.

"Julie made a strong impression upon my heart. She was no longer young when I met her for the first time; the season of storms had passed for her. There was never anything but friendship between us, but as often happens with women whom nature has endowed with sincere feelings, and who have experienced strong emotions, her friendship had in it a tenderness and a passion which gave it a special charm."

He sketches her principles in religion, art, love, etc., and compares her letters to those of Mme. de Sévigné, whom she "excelled in range of ideas, in spontaneity, and in depth of reflection." His praise of her conversation is of interest, coming from one who was an acknowledged master of that art. He mentions as one of the qualities of a good conversationalist which she possessed that she never uttered witticisms which you could remember and repeat. "Witticisms of that sort, although striking in themselves, have the disadvantage of killing conversation; they are, so to speak, rifle-shots which are aimed at the ideas of others and which knock them down. . . . An unexpected response, while it excites a laugh, breaks the continuity of thought and produces a moment of silence." The few examples of Benjamin's skill in repartee that have come down to us, suggest that he, whose witticisms were celebrated, distinguished between casual talk and conversation, and that the latter was an art to be taken seriously and practised scientifically.

Julie Talma had been brought up an atheist, and Benjamin, as we have seen, had coquetted with atheism as a young man, in the school of Mme. de Charrière. But the fanatical aversion of this good and affectionate woman to all arguments for the immortality of the soul which he tried to bring up for her comfort when her son was dying at Soleure, shocked him, sceptic though

1805 he was. Sitting by her bedside as her own life was fast slipping away, he meditated on the mystery of the tenacity of mental and spiritual life in this body whose physical disintegration was already going on. "It is certain that if I were to take that which makes her think, speak, her intelligence, in a word, all her faculties which made me love her so much, and place all this in another body, all would live again. The organs are destroyed, her eyes no longer see, she only breathes with effort, she cannot lift her arm; and yet the intellectual portion is not touched in any way." As he stood by her grave with a little company of sorrowing friends, and thought of the gaiety, grace and generosity now enclosed in that narrow coffin, the emptiness and perfunctoriness of the ceremony struck him as the thing that must have estranged poor Julie from religion. The ceremonies, dogmas, doctrines, with which man had overlaid the revelations of God to his soul—that was to be the theme of his *History of Religions* when it received its final form, and it may be that he owed to the death-bed of this unhappy woman that new attitude toward religion and God which obliged him afterwards to rewrite his work in order to present the facts from an entirely new standpoint.

Meanwhile, rumours of Corinne's triumphs in Italy reached him, and her letters were filled with boastings of her successes and honours and with reproaches for his neglect. "She is always too eager to make herself conspicuous," he wrote in his Journal. "Restlessness and ambition! She does not allow the wings of fortune time to grow; she pulls feather after feather from them in order to make a *panache* for herself."

But with her return to Coppet in the summer—in spite of his vow, "No Coppet nor Geneva; there I find a Lake that has dazzled me, and relations who have constantly criticized me"—he was constrained to obey her summons to join her there. "I am recaptured by Mme. de Staël," he wrote. Thus his literary work was again arrested, since the composition of *Wallstein*, the tragedy which he began at her suggestion, was a perfunctory thing, done largely for the purpose of distracting his mind from his private troubles.

The record of Benjamin's inner life during this period is in the *Journal Intime*; his Apologia is contained in *Adolphe*, which was written in 1807, when he had recovered from the agony of breaking off with this "habit of ten years." Here are some of the ejaculations extracted from the Journal which reflect the struggles he passed through during the next two years.

1806[1] 1806–7

". . . Mme. de Staël rises as a reproach between me and all my plans. . . . A letter from Mme. de Staël. It is the concussion of the universe and the upheaval of chaos! And yet, with all her faults, to me she is superior to every one. . . . I am uncertain about everything like a vessel tossed by two different tempests. . . . No volcano could have such violent outbursts as she! What shall I do? The struggle wearies me, let us lie down in the bark and sleep in the middle of the tempest. . . . The greatest cause of the agitations in my life is the necessity for love. . . . Frightful scene, horrible, mad; atrocious expressions. Either she is crazy or I am. . . . I announce a decisive rupture. Second scene. Fury; reconciliation impossible, departure difficult. I shall have to marry. . . . To-day, October 25, 1806, I enter in my fortieth year. I have had an agitated life, but at no moment have I endured such agonies and uncertainties as at present. . . ."

1807

"Letter from Mme. de Staël. What rage! My God, deliver us from each other! . . . I am tired of this man-woman, whose iron hand has chained me for ten years. . . . Alas, how my time is passed in painful scenes and revulsions of feeling! Yet, underneath, we both feel the break imminent and necessary. . . . Miserable man that I am! Weakness seizes me again. I go to Coppet. Tenderness, desperate scene, then the great threat, 'I will kill myself!' . . . To-day, the 30th of August—note the day—my mind is made up, I leave to-morrow, irrevocably. . . . What did I say? All is undone. The effort is impossible! Frightful day of indecision and agony. . . . A magic power dominates me. I go to Coppet; great God, what shall I do? . . . Painful scene; convulsive night. Why did I come here? I leave early for Lausanne. . . . My soul, in truth, is lacerated. . . . I return to Coppet with her. . . . What shall I do? . . . I tread under my feet my future and my happiness!"

But outwardly and socially these were the halcyon days at Coppet. Every one had gone mad over private theatricals, and Mme. de Staël had formed a distinguished dramatic company from among her guests and acquaintances, who gave far-famed performances at Coppet and also in the theatre she had fitted up in her Geneva apartment on the Place Molard, during the winter of 1805–6. With an audience composed of the élite of Geneva or of Lausanne, and a troupe of actors into which every member of her household was impressed, from the learned Schlegel to her

[1] I offer dates from the *Journal Intime* with great hesitation, in view of M. Rudler's recent discoveries.

1806–7 own *femme de chambre*, she produced the classical French tragedies —*Alzire, Mérope, Mahomet, Phèdre, Zaïre, Andromaque*—in emulation of Voltaire. Even Benjamin—feebly resisting at first, complacent after the experiment—was dragged into service. His relatives were scandalized by the apparition of his long, lean anatomy tricked out in the toggery of a Greek or Indian hero, to which the inevitable spectacles lent an unconventional flavour that was not lost on the audience, while he declaimed in his "thin voice," with stiff gestures, the lines of Zopire, or impersonated that noble Pyrrhus who "made Crete smoke with the blood of the Minotaur." "The necessity of turning play-actor to please his lady," observes Anatole France, "was one more of the inconveniences attaching to her service." [1]

These were the "Great Days" of Coppet, when the château became the inn for visitors from all parts of Europe. Constant, de Sabran, Sismondi, Bonstetten and Schlegel were a recognized appendage of the establishment, but there were other and more celebrated guests, such as Prince Augustus of Prussia, who was in love with Mme. Récamier; Vincenzo Monti, the Italian poet; the Duke of Melzi; Oehlenschlager, a young Danish lyric and tragic writer; the poet and mystic, Zacharias Werner; the Countess de Boigne; Mme. de Krüdner; Byron; Mme. Récamier, of course; Mme. Vigée Le Brun, who came to paint the châtelaine as Corinne; not to mention a continuous stream of Genevese *littérateurs* and scientists. The Countess de Boigne has described them in her *Mémoires*:

"Life seemed to be as lazy as it was desultory; there was no system about anything: no one knew where he was to go, to stay, or to meet. There was no special place for any hour of the day. Everybody's room stood open. You stayed there hours, days, without any of the ordinary habits of life coming in to interrupt. Conversation was the first business of everybody. The word *talent* was much overworked. Everybody was occupied with his talent, or, in a less degree, with somebody else's talent. *This is not in the line of your talent; That does not suit my talent; You ought to dedicate your talent*, etc. . . . There probably was not a needle to be found at Coppet."

[1] "Incredible that they would thus advertise Benjamin's situation," cried Rosalie when she heard he was playing Pyrrhus. "But he seems quite contented to play this rôle!" (To Charles). Mme. de Staël's acting was greatly praised by Schlegel, who said that it "excited Benjamin Constant to write *Wallstein*." Benjamin was well pleased with his own acting. "I did very well," he wrote (*J.I.*), October 6, 1807. "He may be the king of *Epire*, but he is the worst (*le pire*) of kings," they said in Geneva.

Albertine's *talent* seems to have been for reading; her eldest 1806–7
brother had a *talent* for music; the younger one drew; Mme. de Staël was dedicating hers to the little red portfolio which she carried around with her from room to room. "She is the queen," wrote Werner, "and all the men of brains who dwell in her sphere cannot escape from it for she holds them there by a sort of magic. . . . Divided in opinion, they all agree in adoring this idol." How imperious this queen was, an observation in Benjamin's journal will demonstrate. Mme. de Staël having been called to Geneva on business, he, Schlegel, Bonstetten and Sismondi lunched at the château without her; and he notes the cordiality and sense of relief that prevailed at table, like children enjoying themselves in the absence of their teacher.

Mme. de Staël, and some of her guests as well, were being closely watched by the police, and this, while it had its inconveniences, contributed to the excitement of the life at Coppet. To comply with the orders not to cross the French border was not always easy for people living on the west shore of Lake Geneva, where the strip of Swiss territory is very narrow; and there is a story in *Les Emigrés de Coppet* of a picnic, upon which the family at Coppet one day ventured, to the Sources de Versoix, which was on forbidden ground, and to the Château de Divonne. Benjamin's wit had contributed greatly to the gaiety of the occasion, and after lunch the party, which included Mme. Récamier, Jordan, Mme. de Kruger, Montmorency and Barante, started to ascend the mountain. During their absence, which was prolonged by a passing thunderstorm, Fouché's gendarmes appeared upon the scene, while the servants were clearing up the remains of the repast. One of the servants, however, managed to give the pedestrians warning, and while "the exiles" took a side path to the Château de Grilly, where they had friends, the others went unconcernedly back to the picnic ground. The officers, who had never seen the people they were in search of, supposed, until it was too late, that they were in the presence of Constant and Mme. de Staël. The "exiles" were far away when they realized their mistake.

But Benjamin's gaiety was purely external. At heart he was always restless and depressed, whether he was in the whirl of life at Coppet or in attendance upon his lady at Auxerre, that "dullest of all French towns," in the dullest of French inns, in the midst of a shadeless, glaring, sizzling heat, where Schlegel yawned himself into a fever, and Mme. de Staël was so nervous that she jumped

1806–7 at every crack of a postilion's whip. "I am sick," he wrote; "the kind of life I am leading is contrary to physical and moral well-being; my ideas are shattered by this mundane excitement, which is monotonous excitement, for there can be monotony in wit as well as in stupidity." He sums up his idle days with characteristic precision: out of 714 days he has passed 259 without working. His occasional return to the *History of Religion* ("as one adds to a collection of shells or tulips," he wrote Barante), were mechanical and uninspired. It was not until 1807 that the accumulation of conflicting passions which burdened him found expression in his masterpiece, *Adolphe*. His detachment from the political events of this period appears in the idly cynical comments he makes in his letters:

"What do you say to these emperors springing up like mushrooms? It is a great compliment to ours to take him thus for a model. . . . Peoples and kings, new emperors and old emperors—all seem to me deserving of the same sentiment. You know very well that this sentiment must be esteem." (September 10, 1805.)

"They say our brother of Prussia is greatly shocked at the liberty we have taken in borrowing his territory; nevertheless, since we wanted to take the shortest way, it had to be through his states. We have, it is true, made requisitions of lives, and even pillaged the city of Anspach a little, but when one passes through a country it is not for the purpose of dying of hunger there. We shall atone for it by dismissing the prefect of Berlin if he grumbles." (November 1, 1805.)

But while presumably Mme. de Staël also was unhappy, she did not suffer from the vacillations of purpose and mental paralysis which beset him. *Corinne*, her best-known work, was composed during these hectic months, but it bears as little mark of what she was passing through as of the peculiar charms of the country and people which had inspired it. It is easy to believe that it was written, as we are told, in her drawing-room, with all her guests, and especially with Schlegel, at her side. Constant, whose temperament was no more able than hers to enter into the inner shrine of Italian beauty, has described the heroine of this celebrated romance as being "the incarnation of Italy, the daughter of its climate, its sky, its scenery." Of course he knew no more about its scenery and climate and sky than did Rosalie, when she wrote, "*Corinne* makes us *breathe* Italy." The author of *Rome vue par les Ecrivains* is of the opinion that of all the writers who have described Rome, no one has seen it so imperfectly as Mme. de Staël—in short, that

she did not see it at all, merely followed her friends about the streets and talked so much that she could not see anything. Yet, however antiquated *Corinne* may have become for the twentieth-century tourist, the book expressed the æsthetic and archæological interests of its time, and was justly regarded as the masterpiece which Benjamin considered it to be. But we study it in vain for any personal revelations such as we find in *Adolphe*. The story of Corinne's sorrows and problems is not that of Mme. de Staël's, and if Oswald is really intended to represent Benjamin, the resemblance is so superficial as to be almost negligible. It was part of the masculine quality of Mme. de Staël's mind that it was able thus to separate personal experiences from the larger and more abstract interests which were, after all, quite as vital elements in her existence as were the strangely erotic undercurrents that convulsed her. 1806–7

CHAPTER XIII

BREAKING THE FETTERS

(1807–1811)

IN August 1808 Mme. Rilliet-Huber wrote to a friend as follows:

"Mme. de Staël has had a great sorrow; it is the marriage of Benjamin, fixed for this autumn. She has refused for six years to marry him, but can't endure the thought of his marrying any one else. . . . She has forbidden all who are about her to mention the subject which is absorbing her. Within herself she desires to find the strength or the resignation. . . . Benjamin is to leave her in September or October, and goes to be married and settle in Paris with his wife, who has a house all furnished. Mme. de Staël some weeks later will go to Blois, and I hope she will endure this separation better than she fears—and that he will keep his connection with her, at least externally, as he has done for several years." (August 28.)

The precise nature of his connection with Mme. de Staël and their reasons for not marrying after Baron de Staël's death, have furnished a subject for endless and fruitless speculation on the part of their friends and of their biographers. As the Duchesse de Broglie, after her mother's death, demanded the return of all her letters to Benjamin, and is said to have burned them,[1] this mystery will probably never be solved unless the Archives of Coppet some day yield up the secret. The Memoirs of Barras relate the verdict of the gossips.

[1] The story was that Constant "sold her letters to the Duchesse de Broglie (Albertine) for 100,000 francs," and that there was a bonfire afterwards. But in 1828 Constant wrote Mme. Récamier of "letters from our friend which no one ought to see," left with her in 1817. After Benjamin's death Albertine wrote Charlotte, asking for letters from her mother which he had among his papers and had promised should go to her after his death. These may be the letters published by Nolde in English. Their publication in France was arrested by an injunction from Comte d'Haussonville.

"The public saw proofs that were scarcely equivocal, of an affection strongly shared, in the birth of a daughter whom Mme. de Staël called Albertine—whose features, hair, everything in fact, appeared to the world as the striking likeness of M. Constant. . . . I have reason to believe that in spite of cold and frigid outward forms which might be taken for those of calculation, Benjamin Constant possesses a soul which has occasionally played a part in his liaisons of love and friendship; that he has been more of a dupe than a rascal, rather a Tom Jones than a Blifil." [1] 1807

The resemblance between Albertine and Constant was indeed striking. It can be seen to-day in two portraits, one of her as a young girl, and one a small oval of Benjamin's face that hangs opposite it by the chimney at Coppet. Rosalie and Charles refer to it in their letters, and Charles heard that it had excited comment in England, when the mother and daughter were there in 1813–14. Benjamin's devotion to the child was marked, and scandalized his cousin.[2] "A charming child," he called her, after they had been to the theatre together in Weimar, and every one agreed with that estimate. "*Spirituelle*, sincere, amiable," says Mme. de Chastenay; a little careless in her dress, it was said; independent in her manners, prone to introspection and conscious at a tender age of unsatisfied longings. She played the harp delightfully, and as her education had been carefully supervised by her mother, we may be sure it had been neither stereotyped nor superficial. Her strong religious bent and the irreproachable discretion of her conduct were remarkable, considering the environment of her childhood, and she finally married a good and conservative husband, with whom she lived a happy domestic life, apparently undisturbed by any such tempests and convulsions as had tormented her more emotional mother. "Alas, Albertine!" is the sole comment in Benjamin's journal upon his final parting with Mme. de Staël after their break.

Whether the fault was his or hers, whether Benjamin had never pleaded his cause with sufficient warmth, as Rosalie says Mme.

[1] In the autumn of 1796 Baron de Staël, who, according to a rumour mentioned by Rosalie, was "again in love with his wife," was at Coppet, and in December he took Mme. de Staël to Aix. Albertine was born 8th June. Benjamin announced her birth to Samuel de Constant in a letter of 13th June.

[2] Albertine returned this affection and continued her intercourse with him, in spite of his political estrangement from her husband, long after her mother's death. In 1814 she wrote him, "I cannot see your writing or hear news of you without experiencing an emotion that comes not only from the affection I have for you, but from all the souvenirs and impressions of childhood."

1807 de Staël confided to her, or whether for her own sake, or that of her children, Mme. de Staël was unwilling to change her name and lose her title, or whether they both feared the consequences of tying together irrevocably two such strange and emotional temperaments as theirs—it is certain that in the curious situation which resulted Mme. de Staël had the advantage, since it secured for her the companionship and devotion of a very brilliant man, without the least sacrifice of her own freedom and independence; while he was condemned to be "always necessary and never sufficient," as the Countess de Boigne has aptly expressed his predicament, in the rôle of "perpetual Sigisbee." [1]

Whenever he escaped from Coppet to bury himself in his hermitage, the opportunity for solitary reflection upon his "long and bizarre state of dependence—much more confining than marriage"—strengthened his determination to refuse to be any longer the "satellite of a brilliant meteor." Marriage to another woman seemed the only means of escape. As early as May 1797 he had written to his aunt:

"I am writing you, my dear aunt, from the midst of the profoundest solitude amid my forests, and feeling that the only thing lacking to make my situation happy, is permanence. I am writing to ask if you can help to give this situation what it lacks. A tie to which I am faithful from duty, or, if you prefer, from weakness, but to which I am sure that I shall be faithful so long as no more real duty releases me from it, and which I cannot break without confessing that I am terribly weary of it—a tie, which (plunging me into a society which I no longer enjoy) renders me profoundly unhappy, threatening to cause great confusion in my fortune (which, in the wandering life I have led, I have acquired only by miracle) . . . has fettered me for two years.

"I am isolated without being independent; I am subjugated without being united. I see the last years of my youth slipping away without possessing either the repose of solitude or the legitimate right to sweet affection. . . . Can you guess, my dear aunt, to what I am coming? To a matter which I have been planning for a year, concerning which I have written you twenty letters which I tore up, in short, to ask you for a wife. I need one in order to be happy. . . . I desire to owe her to you." (To Mme. de Nassau, Hérivaux, May 18, 1797.)

[1] Benjamin frequently protests that he loves her only with *amitié*, but that she asks for more. An unsigned letter from Rosalie to Charles in the Geneva Archives says that Mme. de Staël told her that she would have married him had he "asked her with more feeling and showed more eagerness to marry." Béranger doubted if he was capable of enough passion to be a lover.

Several Lausanne ladies had been proposed by his family as candidates for this honour, but on one pretext or another were rejected, and as soon as he was again united to Mme. de Staël his yearnings for matrimony were quenched. 1807

It was while Mme. de Staël was in Italy that Charlotte Hardenberg had again appeared upon the scene. It will be recalled that as Baroness Marenholz she had figured in some sort of a romance with him in Brunswick, which had gone so far that gossip had traced to it their respective divorces. Only Benjamin's prudence in ignoring her when he returned to Brunswick after his separation from Minna saved them from a scandal. Less discreet than he, Charlotte had attempted to renew the intimacy, and meeting with a rebuff had departed to her father's castle near Göttingen, and after her marriage to a French *émigré*, she seems to have entirely dropped out of his life. But "the object that escapes you is quite different from that which pursues you," Benjamin has written, and when, in 1805 Charlotte appeared in Paris as Mme. Dutertre, she suddenly acquired a new interest for him. At a "ridiculous dinner" with the Dutertre couple, where the husband displayed some signs of jealousy, he renewed the flirtation, but not seriously. They parted, at least he did, "without a pang," and on meeting again eighteen months later, she agreed to return his old love letters. But within a week, with one of his characteristic rebounds of feeling, he decided that he was in love with her. "I see Mme. Dutertre often. She charms me greatly; piquancy, *esprit*, goodness, gentleness, which gives me a feeling of supreme happiness. I feel that union with her would bring peace into my life. If M. Dutertre would agree to break the bonds to which he attaches no weight, my future lies there, and Charlotte accepts it." The intimacy now progressed rapidly; she was "growing much handsomer." "To-night I shall be master of the field," he wrote. Charlotte had played her cards much better than twelve years before. Several days of "delirious delight" with her in the country convinced him that she was "an angel of gentleness and of charm, all amiability," and he marvelled at his stupidity in having relinquished this "adorable creature" only to put his head into the yoke of the "most imperious being in the world."[1] Nothing is more characteristic of Benjamin than these extravagant seizures, to be followed by sudden revulsions; unless it be his equally astonishing ability to stand off and observe and analyse his own emotions in the very height of his transports. And,

[1] The quotations in this paragraph are from the *Journal Intime*.

1807 although it would be pleasant to read into this union of two hearts so long separated a beautiful romance, it is plainly a mere case of propinquity under favourable circumstances. Charlotte happened to present herself at the moment when his revulsion from Mme. de Staël's despotism was at its height. This quiet, self-effacing creature represented the very opposite of the woman who was dominating him and was, moreover, associated with that past which always assumed alluring outlines in proportion to its remoteness.

M. Dutertre, having been persuaded by his confessor that in marrying a divorced woman, and a Protestant, he had really been living in concubinage, proved willing, for a substantial consideration, it is said, to compound with heaven and Benjamin for the release of Charlotte, and she on her part made all possible speed back to Germany to secure authorization for her second divorce.

Just how early in the game Mme. de Staël became aware of his attentions to Charlotte is not clear. On the 1st of September 1807, however, occurred a celebrated scene, which must have been connected with some avowal of inconstancy, when the frantic Lady of Victories—" this fury with foam on her lips and a poignard in her hand," to quote the Journal, forcibly removed him from the protection of his indignant female relatives. Rosalie has recounted the episode in a much-quoted passage, which has become a classic. It is an interesting contribution to the study of Psychiatry.

On the 31st of August Benjamin, fortified by the exhortations of his aunt and of Rosalie, had left Lausanne for Coppet, with the intention of presenting to Mme. de Staël the ultimatum of immediate marriage or final rupture of their relations. Early the following morning Rosalie was dismayed to see him returning on horseback, dusty, exhausted, having covered the twenty-five miles between Coppet and Lausanne in two and a half hours. He related to the ladies at La Chaumière the manner of his reception at Coppet; how in her most dramatic style the châtelaine had summoned Schlegel and her children into the room as witnesses to his brutality, saying: "Here is the man who is placing me between despair and the necessity of compromising your existence and your fortune." In the scene which followed, she cast herself screaming upon the floor, and tried to strangle herself with her handkerchief. The effect upon Schlegel and the children is not related, but upon Benjamin, who was constitutionally unable to resist tears, the result was instant melting, and a truce was effected. But after a sleepless night at Coppet, he had arisen at daybreak, stolen

to the stable, harnessed his horse, sneaked out of the courtyard, and 1807–8
was off for Lausanne before any one in the château was awake.

Scarcely had he finished telling his story to his aunt and cousin when the voice of his late hostess was heard below, and Rosalie, who had taken the precaution to turn the key of the room where he was, as she left it, stood aghast to see the most celebrated woman in France prostrate upon the stairs, her throat bare, her long black hair unfastened and sweeping the steps, while she sobbed, "Where is he? I must find him again!" It was too late to persuade her that Benjamin was not here. The sounds of her distress had penetrated to the drawing-room above, where he was imprisoned, and they heard him begging frantically to be released. "She has carried him back to Coppet for six weeks," Rosalie concludes. "A heart of iron could not have resisted her," says the Journal. "I am back at Coppet. I have promised to remain six weeks. And Charlotte expecting me at the end of September! Great God, what am I to do? I trample my future and my happiness under my feet!"

Many years after, Rosalie wrote at the bottom of an old letter from Benjamin dating from this most miserable and unedifying period of his existence, "He had the art of deceiving all his defenders, and he deceived Rosalie more than all the others." She might have added, "And he deceived himself more than Rosalie." Hopelessly entangled in the web of his own subterfuges, he insisted to himself that, "People who accuse me of weakness are not able to judge me correctly. In order to know what they would do in my position, they must be in my position, and—I say it with the deepest conviction—I believe that, to do better, it would be necessary to be worth less." He wrote *Adolphe* in proof of this, and to demonstrate how his morbid dread of causing pain to others made a coward of him.

In December Mme. de Staël went to Vienna, accompanied by Schlegel and her children, and the following June Benjamin and Charlotte were secretly married by the clergyman of the parish of Besançon, near Juste's home. Charlotte passed a dreary winter in seclusion, and for the most part alone, at Juste's home in Dôle, while Benjamin was looking for an opportune time to announce his marriage[1] to the Châtelaine of Coppet. But a year

[1] June 5. The supposed date given in the *Carnet* (a journal of Constant's, the original of which is lost, but of which Sainte-Beuve has used several fragments) has been confirmed by Ettlinger from documents in the possession of Charlotte's descendants.

1808–9 and a half passed before he finally screwed up courage to face the inevitable rupture with the "Terrible Lady." Sainte-Beuve would have us believe that Benjamin sent for Mme. de Staël to meet him at the inn at Sécheron,[1] just outside of Geneva, and without warning presented her to Mme. de Constant. Charlotte, unruffled and angelic, reiterating, "You see, Benjamin is so good!" enraged her rival by her German insipidity; but she was no match for our Lady of Victories, who demanded that the bride should be banished again until plans could be made for covering her own discomfiture, and ended by carrying Benjamin back to Coppet with her. With this may be connected a story related by the Countess de Boigne of the arrival of Mme. de Staël accompanied by her "Paladins," Camille Jordan, Montmorency, Schlegel and Benjamin, at Lyons, where they had come to see Talma act, and of the attempted suicide of Charlotte at the inn.

Two years passed before Mme. de Staël had braced herself for the public announcement of the marriage, during which period we find Benjamin sometimes at Coppet, sometimes at his father's with Charlotte, but always distracted and uncertain. Many months afterwards he recalls in his Journal the final parting:

"On this day at eleven in the morning, on the stairs of the Hôtel de la Couronne at Lausanne, I parted from Mme. de Staël, who said that she felt that we were destined not to meet again during our lives. That is as it should be. Alas, dear Albertine!"

Meanwhile he had already quietly stolen away to Paris and reaffirmed on October 18, 1809, in the presence of Charlotte's distinguished relatives (who had come to France in the suite of the Queen of Westphalia), and with all the proper ceremonies and documents, the marriage which had been so hastily solemnized nearly eighteen months before. There might have been marriages, he wrote his aunt, which were more simply and expeditiously accomplished, but there had never been a husband more happy in his wife, to whom each day he found his attachment increasing. It was only to Rosalie that he admitted that, notwithstanding the sweetness and docility and devotion of Charlotte, there remained "from an attachment of fifteen years—terrible, stormy, but profound—sources of pain so deep as not to be easily dried up."

[1] The famous Hôtel Déjean now demolished, on the road from Geneva to Lausanne, where Byron, Shelley, and other celebrities stayed. Again there is uncertainty as to dates. The *Carnet* makes the meeting occur on May 13, 1808.

"There are times," he cried, in an agony of reminiscence, "when 1808–9
bitter and heart-rending expressions of suffering, pictures almost magical, written in a form which vibrates in a soul whose habit has been to yield to them, return suddenly and rend my heart and confound my brain." Long after the fires of passion and anger had burned out, he could still write as pensively of them as he did to Barante from Les Herbages :

"The country is horrible ; not a leaf on the trees. A wintry wind blows through their black branches, nothing speaks of the springtime of nature, which is the more essential to me because my autumn has already begun. Believe me, my dear Prosper, one must create about him something to draw him out of himself. This cannot be society, it is too indifferent ; it cannot be business, that demands activity of mind, and it is most of all in the moments when the mind is weary that distraction is needed. . . . I am surrounded here by a correspondence dating back over nearly twenty years, almost entirely with people now dead, and which I cannot resist re-reading incessantly, although it tires my eyes and sometimes breaks my heart. It is not so much the regret for individuals which saddens me, although some of them have been an irreparable loss to me, but the sentiment of the past, and this death at the end of so much activity and of so many ties, of so many quarrels, sometimes ; it is, above all, in the letters of women that this is felt. There is not a single one whom I have loved who has not broken off, whether with reason or not, but these ruptures, which appear very simple while the objects are living, become horribly sad when they have terminated in this great and silent catastrophe which terminates everything. . . . I gaze upon all these letters written by hands which now are dust, on these letters which can no longer be answered, and to which, when I did answer, I opposed so many arguments based on life and circumstance and the future—all this argument, all these uncertainties, all this future is buried in the grave which has itself disappeared." (April 22, 1808.)

As for Mme. de Staël, she consoled herself for his desertion with a handsome and gallant young soldier named Jean de Rocca, who boasted a sword-wound received in Spain, to which a romantic adventure lent added éclat. The middle-aged woman, who had confessed that she had always loved her lovers more than they loved her, had surrendered before the ardent wooing of this young and persistent cavalier, on his black Andalusian steed, and while keeping him in the background almost as much as Benjamin had kept poor Charlotte, ended by once more becoming a mother. Not until after her death did it become known that the frail con-

1811 sumptive young man who accompanied her in her last wanderings about Europe, and haunted her sick-chamber during her final illness, was her husband. This, then, was the lot for which the Queen-Bee had doubtless destined Benjamin, had she succeeded in subjugating him as she did this susceptible stripling! Although rumours of the liaison had reached him—rumours which Mme. de Staël assured him were baseless—Benjamin knew no more of this marriage than any other outsider, but he met Rocca during the early days of the courtship, and not only found his manners bad and his conversation stupid, but was so unfortunate as to excite the jealousy of the new lover. At supper one night in Mme. de Staël's apartment in Geneva, an unpleasant exchange of compliments between the two men led to a rendezvous on the Pont d'Arve, and a sanguinary termination was narrowly averted. The fiery young Rocca had expressed a desire to cut Benjamin's throat, and in anticipation of that unhappy event Benjamin wrote his will, closing with a message for the two ladies who would presumably suffer the most :

"I beg my wife's forgiveness for all the trouble I have caused her, and for this last catastrophe which will be a cause of still more misery for her. I beg her on no account to believe that I did anything to provoke it. My true, deep and unchangeable love for her was an obstacle which prevented any act of gallantry on my part towards any other woman. I love no one as I love her; she has been an angel to me, and my last sentiments are those of Dante towards his beloved. I forgive Mme. de Staël for the fatality of which she will have been the cause, and I do not hold her responsible for the savagery of a young barbarian."

The duel was never fought, and soon after this episode occurred the final parting at the *Couronne* which has already been related.

It is unfortunate that almost the only letters from Mme. de Staël to Benjamin that survive are of the kind that he called "the concussion of the universe and the upheaval of chaos," and that the invectives and reproaches which fill them were occasioned by nothing more dignified than a quarrel over business. Their financial relations during their intimacy had been complicated by her indifference to the manner in which Benjamin, acting frequently as her confidential secretary and business agent, conducted her affairs. Not only had they become joint owners of certain properties, but she appears to have loaned him money on several occasions, and it was natural that when the final break came, Benjamin should have desired a definite settlement of their finances.

This was difficult to arrange, as no clear records of their transactions 1815
had been kept, and as Mme. de Staël, perhaps desiring to retain some hold upon him in this way, refused to aid or interest herself in any way in his uneasy attempts to straighten out the business. He did however, during his last visit to Coppet in winter of 1810, succeed in arriving at some sort of an understanding with her, by which upon his decease she or her heirs were to receive 80,000 francs, and this agreement, which was duly executed in legal form on the 21st of March 1811, was an annulment of all previous contracts and covered both principal and interest of his obligations to her. Four years later, however, when she was trying to arrange Albertine's marriage to the Duke de Broglie,[1] and found herself hampered for funds by the impossibility of obtaining the repayment of her father's loan to the French Government, made at the time when he was Minister of Finance, she bethought herself of Benjamin's indebtedness to her; and as he was just then in the brief enjoyment of a lucrative office under the Napoleonic government of the Hundred Days, she suddenly demanded the immediate delivery of her money, regardless of previous agreements. Upon his objection that their arrangements had provided for no such unexpected summons, she flooded him with reproachful and abusive letters, which have in some mysterious manner escaped the holocaust that destroyed a correspondence far worthier, no doubt, of the splendid heart and brain that had enthralled him.

"... I neglected to make you sign it, but as you talk of letters, I have one that contains this promise, in which you beg me on bended knees to allow you to participate in Albertine's happiness. What a man, who being to-day in fortunate circumstances—oh, unfortunate that we are!—does not try to be useful to my daughter! What a man, who does as much harm to a child as he has done to her mother! What a man! Imagination shudders with horror at such a proof. ... However, all is over between you and me; between you and Albertine; between you and whoever is still capable of feeling. In the future I shall only speak through lawyers." (May 25, 1815.)

"... This last trait is worthy of you! Worthy of you! To threaten a woman with intimate letters which may compromise her and her family! so as not to pay her the money he owes her! ... You owe me 80,000 francs—thirty-four to my father,

[1] A distinguished Constitutionalist, who served the Empire and was in the House of Peers under Louis XVIII. He was one of the Doctrinaires. Parisians said he whispered with his *inamorata* about the salt-tax instead of love. They were married in Italy, February 1816.

1815 eighteen on your note for Vallombreuse, with interest for ten years. If I should die of grief to-morrow, it would hurt you much less than having paid your debts. . . . You write me that you wanted to break with me and that I held you by (illegible) of money. I believe it, but it is iniquitous to say it. . . . The horror of the recollection of my youth devastated by your frightful temper!" (May 28, 1815.)

"You are the most profoundly bitter and indelicate man on earth to-day. You tell me that for six thousand years women have complained of men for not loving them. . . . You tell me that my sadness made more impression upon you once. Will you tell me if it prevented you from marrying in spite of a promise of marriage made to me? . . . There is not one spot of my heart that has not been ravaged by your persistent hatred. I took refuge in the past, you found it necessary to tell my daughter and myself that you had never loved a woman . . . (illegible) insinuations of a roué which you might have spared Albertine's innocence. I still wished to retain a tie with you by the service that you could have rendered my daughter . . . you who buy houses and pay for them with your winnings as you have told me; you who go every evening to the foreign salons, you do not know how to make a sacrifice for the daughter of a person who gave up 80,000 francs for you. I have been told that the act you made me sign, which you drew up and wrote yourself, is not legal; we shall see! But I do know that your pretended legacy, without mortgage or other guarantee, cannot marry Albertine." (June 12, 1815.)

Nevertheless, Albertine became the Duchess of Broglie in due time, and the matter of the money was dropped.[1] Thus was terminated, outwardly at least, a connection that had brought so much suffering to them both. "Corinne" had said of herself when viewing the possibility of Oswald's desertion, "I possess a great capacity for happiness"; so was it with Mme de Staël, once she had made up her mind to give up Benjamin; but she never ceased to believe that in leaving her he had forfeited a brilliant future and had lost the inspiration to achievement that she would have given him. In 1813 she wrote him:

"Do you remember saying that we ought not to be separated? I can honestly say that, apart from everything else, you have allowed a fine career to escape you: and what is to become of me

[1] Kohler has printed the full text of her lawyer's decision. The dispute terminated by her writing him (August 11): "Your justification is perfect. There is no possibility of asking you legally. Do not think any more of what is in question between us." After her death, letters exchanged between Charles and Rosalie testify that he "behaved honourably," and that her children and friends praised his conduct (in regard to money settlements).

in my spiritual solitude? With whom can I talk and how shall I exist on my own resources? . . . My daughter will write you from Gothenburg. It will be her last farewell and mine; but I hope that you will still feel the need of seeing us again and not neglect that which God has given you. . . . I always keep letters of yours; I never take out my writing materials without taking them up and looking at the address; all that I have suffered through that handwriting makes me shudder, and yet I would fain see it again. My father and you and Mathieu share a part of my heart which is eternally closed. . . . I live in the past and were I about to be swallowed up by the waves my voice would utter these names, one of which alone was harmful to me. Is it possible that you brought such ruin?—that despair such as mine could not restrain you? No, you are guilty, and only your admirable intellect can cause me any further illusions. Farewell, farewell. What I suffer you cannot understand."[1] (May 20, 1813. Stockholm?) 1812–13

"Love petrified" is the phrase by which Mme. de Staël is said to have described their relation after the break. But it was more like a dying fire, still smouldering far down in the embers, and starting up again fitfully with every little gust of recollection. "I have found at the bottom of my heart," she wrote him two years before her death, on learning of his illness, "emotions that I had believed to be extinct." Her love for him, she acknowledged, had been the most intense thing in her life. "Can it be that such a man scorned such an affection, and that such a woman did not know how to make herself beloved, when she loved to the depths of her being?"

On his part, the attachment was slowly burning out, but every time a letter from her reached him, the old tenderness and irresolution revived.

"The thought of her and of Albertine distracts me. My heart is weary of everything that it possesses, and regrets everything which it has not. Perhaps Charlotte's gentleness will at last destroy this continual recollection. How sad life is, and what a madman I am! I am planning a trip to Vienna; that recalls Mme. de Staël's efforts to take me there with her. Thus, what I did not want to do with the most *spirituelle* of women, I am to-day thinking of doing with Charlotte. Judgment of Heaven! Strange succession of follies, which made me, in order not to leave Paris, contract a marriage which casts me upon Göttingen!" (*Journal Intime*, 1812.)

[1] "Benjamin, you have ruined my life," she wrote him in 1813. "For ten years no day has gone by without some suffering on your account."

1817 They met again in a Paris salon after the Bourbon Restoration, without apparent emotion on either side. He thought her much altered—paler and thinner ; she thought him bitter and dissatisfied. They saw each other frequently after that, in society or at her house where he was often a guest, but the old intimacy was never resumed. Mme. de Staël did not long survive the remission of her exile which the Restoration had brought her. " I have loved those I no longer love," she wrote in her last work, *Considérations sur la Révolution*, " respected those I no longer respect ; the wave of life has dragged everything along with it, everything except the great shadow before me on the summit of the mountain pointing to the life that is to come." She entered that shadow after a hard fight against the disease that had seized her, in February 1817, sleeping herself away very quietly. Although many of her old friends were with her at the last, Benjamin was not summoned. To the faithful Schlegel he wrote shortly before the end came :

" What I have heard horrifies me. Is there no possibility of seeing Mme. de Staël ? Others see her, why not I ? What I feel is indescribable. Believe me, the past is a terrible spectre, when one trembles for a being whom one has caused to suffer. I implore you to give me news of her, and if it will do her no harm, let me go to her." [1]

In his *Souvenirs* Albertine's husband, the Duc de Broglie, relates how he and Benjamin kept vigil together for one night beside the body of Mme. de Staël—a night of grief and remorse for Benjamin. But he was not among the little group of closest friends who went to Coppet for the burial, although he speaks of receiving a letter from Albertine, who had remained there, containing details of the declaration of her mother's marriage with Rocca, which, together with the recognition of the child born of that union, was first made public through her will. " I am sad and mostly indifferent," he adds. " In vain I try to rouse my interest. It will not come. Neither success nor failure move me. In everything, I no longer live."

It may be, as her latest biographer, M. Pierre Kôhler, admits, that as compared with her predecessor, Mme. de Charrière, Mme. de Staël was lacking in the quality of " charm " ; certainly she lacked the reserve and inwardness that constituted a great part of Mme. Récamier's attraction. But she also was guiltless of

[1] An unsigned, undated note, in Benjamin's handwriting, found among Schlegel's papers and printed by Blennerhassett.

Juliet's subtlety and coquetry; with her all was open, sincere 1817
and intense, and in spite of her weaknesses and of the misplaced emphasis and faulty logic that marred her philosophy of life, it is impossible not to admire her genuineness, her enthusiasm, her loyalty, her eagerness to know and to accomplish, her warm and generous heart. Imperious and tyrannical though she was, there was nothing mean or small about her, and even her faults sprang from her virtues, as Benjamin recognized when he sketched her character for Mme. Récamier.

"A superb air, a charming smile, a habitual expression of kindness; absence of all affectation and of all embarrassing reserve; flattering in her appreciation, but with a flattery which seemed to spring from her enthusiasm . . . I know no woman, nor man, even, more convinced of her immense superiority over every one, and who made this conviction less burdensome to others; it is not egotism, it is self-respect. The self-respect of Mme. de Staël interests, and inspires a certain religious reverence. . . ."

That tenderness and pity which surpassed even her inextinguishable passion for glory and her ardent love of liberty, found in her devotion to her father their highest satisfaction. And to his appreciation of her Biography of Necker as embodying her finest qualities, Benjamin added his personal tribute to the loyal affection she accorded her friends.

"What was she not to those to whom she was united by the ties of affection? How perfect their assurance that her thoughts responded to their thoughts! . . . With what graceful adaptability she transported herself into even their inmost feelings, their most fleeting impressions; with what precision she developed their most vague ideas! . . . Even that rare talent of conversation, which she possessed almost exclusively, appeared in these happy moments to have been created for her friends alone."[1]

These revelations of the weaknesses of two brilliant and distinguished people should not make us forget that we have been trespassing on very private matters, that the love-affairs as well as quarrels of heroes may often lack dignity when subjected to the scrutiny of a dispassionate public, and that we owe to those whose secrets we have so rudely invaded the indulgence and sympathy due to all genuine emotion and pain.

Nor can these hysterical episodes dim the true greatness of this extraordinary woman. On the canvas of her age she surely

[1] From the *Notice* which he published after her death.

1817 occupies the centre, next to the despot who honoured her with his persecution; and Benjamin, notwithstanding his revolts against her whims and tyranny, owed her a great debt, intellectually if not politically. Although his greatest services to France were performed after he had escaped from her leading-strings, it is quite possible that without Mme. de Staël we might never have heard of Benjamin Constant. His gratitude to her found frank expression in the Introduction to her Biography of her father, which he wrote after her death (almost as if in expiation of all the pain he had given her), when he was

> "overwhelmed by the bitter reflection that this testimony of friendship was not offered to the one who is its object before she had fallen into a state of weakness, when it had become dangerous to excite or even indulge emotions of affection which . . . formed the elements of her existence. . . . Now that she is snatched from us by death, we are sinking under the weight of those words which we were compelled to suppress until the fatal moment when utterance . . . seems to be a kind of profanation. . . .
>
> "Who indeed shall describe her! They whose grief is restrained could not perform the task. By those whose sorrow is measured by an affection never to be effaced, it might be accomplished, but it cannot be attempted."

CHAPTER XIV

RESIDENCE IN GERMANY

(1811–1813)

FOR the first time since he arrived at manhood, Benjamin was now free to *arranger sa vie*, as he was always threatening to do, untrammelled by feminine interference. To be sure there was Charlotte, but her influence was purely incidental and quite negligible. She led nowhere. *Douce* is the word he uses most often in referring to her; *douce et angélique*, as opposed to *oragieuse*, which had been his favourite epithet for Mme. de Staël. Yet it is significant that this was the second time he had turned to her when exhausted by conflicts with a temperamental woman. Sismondi voiced the verdict of the Coppet circle when he wrote of her (to the Countess of Albany):

"M. de Constant has made a very strange choice. Men often imagine that the tumult in their hearts is stirred up by the object of their affections, and that they will be calmed if they attach themselves to some apathetic being. It is one way to flee from themselves, by fleeing from some one who resembles them; but this way cannot succeed long. Disgust for life is bound to follow, and he who has committed a first suicide in killing his mind by union with an inferior being, seems to me on the road to encounter a second. I would be glad to be mistaken about Benjamin Constant, but I fear he has done everything to render himself consummately wretched."

Benjamin's relatives were equally astonished at his choice. "Neither young nor rich nor entertaining" was the report sent them by Victor, who had known Charlotte long before in Brunswick, when she had confided to him the story of Benjamin's early flirtation with her, and had shown his love-letters and "the beginning of a history of his life which he had written at her house." Casual acquaintances were amused at the ill-assorted match. An Englishman who saw them taking snuff together concluded Constant must

1809 have married her out of curiosity to know why her first husband married her. Benjamin presents her to us without any illusions —her plump white hands, her laziness, physical and mental, her German affectations and sentimentalities,—yet nevertheless a "good woman, and a woman of *esprit*, of that kind of *esprit*—how shall I say it?—which hasn't one particle of piquancy nor of originality nor of depth, but of which, none the less, one would say that it was *esprit*." One more witness to the character of Charlotte comes from Benjamin's friend and colleague in the Chamber of Deputies, Pagès,[1] who wrote her in 1835:

"You are like the swallows who no longer recognize their offspring when they have driven them from the nest. You lack another kind of affection, and if you love your son, it is as a mistress does. You love him because he is handsome, because he has good manners, and is successful with women. But . . . never . . . for the reason that you are his mother."

"She has much charm, it is true, but little variety and a great vagueness of sentiment," Benjamin wrote when at the height of his infatuation, and as these mild, imperturbable people are frequently very exasperating to a nervous temperament like his, disputes and "scenes" were not wholly wanting, even in this *douce et angélique* society—and questions of residence in Göttingen, or of his preoccupations with his studies, or about differences of political opinion which her birth and connection with courts and ceremonies rendered inevitable, stirred up occasional mild imitations of the Coppet tempests. Benjamin was quick to reproach himself for wounding this mild creature. "Instead of being feeble and harsh I should be firm and gentle," he reflected. In the course of time he succeeded in placing their relations on a basis which afforded most comfort and freedom to himself, and thereafter the union, to quote Shaw's immortal waiter in *You Never Can Tell*, "turns out very comfortable on the whole from time to time." "I owe her much happiness," he wrote Rosalie in 1809; "she is the most devoted person, the sweetest, the easiest to please by little attentions and affections." After all he had found in her what he sought; "some one rich enough not to impoverish me, gay enough not to be affected by my fits of depression, with sufficient sensibility to appreciate my desire to make her happy, sufficiently clever to understand, sufficiently placid to endure an absolute hermitage,

[1] Pagès d'Ariège, who collaborated with Constant on the *Courrier*, and had a room at his house.

CHARLOTTE CONSTANT, *NÉE* VON HARDENBERG

From a pastel in the possession of Baroness Elizabeth Nolde.
By permission of Fleischel & Co. of Berlin.

sufficiently well bred never to be ridiculous in society, with enough 1810
feeling to love me to distraction, reasonable enough to love me to distraction only when I want her to ; in addition, educated, gentle and pretty . . . and above all, some one whose name will not appear in the newspapers ! "

The terms of Benjamin's settlement with Mme. de Staël had necessitated his renouncing his share in the house they owned jointly in the rue des Mathurins [1] in Paris, and immediately upon his return from Coppet in March 1810 he hastily transferred his possessions, together with Charlotte, who was ill with a fever, to another house, and later to Les Herbages, where they spent the summer, "as happy as human conditions permit." But the wet, unpleasant season interfered considerably with the blissfulness of this belated honeymoon. "The seasons are upset like the rulers," he wrote. "Meteors of horrible shapes appear everywhere. The earth trembles. Is it not the end of the world ? " The summer was also darkened by the terrible tragedy of the Schwartzenberg ball, which was given by the Austrian Ambassador to celebrate Napoleon's marriage to Marie Louise. A hall of flimsy boards, which had been erected close to the Embassy, and decorated with gauze, paint and other inflammable materials, caught fire, and a fearful panic ensued. Many of the guests, including the Ambassador's wife, perished in the flames. Benjamin, writing to Mme. Récamier in September, said :

"Paris is sad and deserted. The victims of the fête of M. de Schwartzenberg continue to die from time to time. Mme. Tougard died day before yesterday after weeks of suffering. She leaves a daughter also burned, her face entirely covered with hideous scars. It seems to me that except for the Decennial prize, of which I have heard much, I have not the courage to write a word or speak of anything. Some author has said that happiness is a serious state. Another says that whenever man is serious he fails into unconquerable melancholy. Whence I conclude that happiness is a very melancholy disposition, and I conclude that we are very happy. . . . As melancholy leads to suicide, we shall end in hanging ourselves for happiness." (September 8, 1810.)

[1] A will made by Mme. de Staël before she went to Italy alludes to this house : "Following arrangements that we have made together, I declare that a house in the rue des Mathurins, of which half was bought by M. Fourcault under the name of Mme. Nassau, your aunt, belongs to you (the half that is not M. Fourcault's) for life. You will leave the property to my daughter after you ; . . . if you judge best to sell this half, with consent of my daughter's guardians, you will invest the capital, but the interest belongs to you . . . for life." (November 1, 1804.)

1810 Moreover the old gambling habits were reasserting themselves. An entry in the *Carnet*, under October 28, notes that on that date he and Charlotte returned to Paris (perhaps from the Château of Chaumont near Blois, which Mme. de Staël had taken in the spring, and where he certainly visited her in October), and adds, "I continue to play and always lose!" Disgusted and disillusioned by the apparent extinction of the ideals of the Revolution under the military despotism of Napoleon, he had abandoned all his political interests, and consoled himself by a return to the scholar's life which he professed to prefer. The time seemed to have arrived for the fulfilment of his dreams of study in Germany, and especially since the ancestral castle where his wife's family lived was at Hardenburg, only a few miles from Göttingen, with its fine library and university. A visit was made *en route* to Lausanne, in order that Charlotte might be presented to her husband's relatives, and Rosalie (who was greatly occupied just at that time in settling her brother's family in the old home at St. Jean near Geneva, which Charles had bought on his return from England), was importuned to find an apartment for her cousins, and a servant to wait upon them.

"And now come the Benjamins, coolly writing me that they will arrive on the 12th, and begging me to find them lodgings here—with all kinds of affectionate protests of delight, etc., to find themselves living together. They write quite at their ease—after having said a hundred times that they would arrive the beginning of December!" (To Charles, December 27, 1810. Geneva Archives.)

The apartment was finally secured, on the Place St. François, and Rosalie's sense of humour was gratified by the idea of getting Mme. de Charrière's faithful maid and one-time protégé, Henriette Monachon, to attend them; but true to their reputation, "the Benjamins" delayed and postponed, and it was not until January, when Rosalie had gone to pay her first visit to Charles, that they arrived in Lausanne. The relatives, however, both Constant and Chandieu, dutifully welcomed and entertained the visitors, and after a month of tea-drinkings and family parties Benjamin wrote her of the gratifying "graciousness" and "attentions" on the part of his cousins and aunts, adding, however, that the social life in Lausanne was somewhat dull, owing partly to "some bankruptcies and several deaths." A still more serious cause of heaviness during this Swiss honeymoon was a bitter quarrel with Juste over money. Rumours of his son's incontinent gambling, and a general impression that

this new wife was bringing him a fortune,[1] and, in Benjamin's belief, 1811
some meddlesome suggestions of Mme. de Staël's, had stirred up Juste to take steps to provide for the future welfare of his second family by demanding the return of half the property he had made over to his son at the time of his marriage to Wilhelmina von Cramm, twenty years before. He claimed that the marriage settlement had been intended only as a temporary business adjustment, and attempted to establish his pretensions by a lawsuit to recover the property. In the bitter dispute that followed, Benjamin, although greatly distressed by his father's angry threat, and by the unpleasant situation it created for Charlotte on her first visit to his family, showed great forbearance and patience, and made every effort to adjust matters in a manner which would be fair to Marianne's children as well as to himself. But Juste was as unreasonable and fickle as he was abusive, and the miserable controversy continued, to the scandal of the relatives on both sides, whose sympathies were entirely with Benjamin, until the old man's death in 1812. A letter assuring Juste of his son's willingness to accede to his demands for a generous provision for Marianne's children reached him when he was on his death-bed, but it was a source of comfort to Benjamin that all cause of dispute was removed before it was too late.

It was during a trip to Geneva in connection with this quarrel that Charlotte was first presented to Rosalie at Charles's house. Rosalie's comment on her new cousin expresses the perfectly negative impression she seems to have left everywhere : " Although she is neither young nor handsome nor rich, she is neither old nor ugly nor poor." On their return to Lausanne, Rosalie was at home again, and had an opportunity to see more of the strange pair, and to hear some of the chapters of the *History of Religions* read aloud at their gatherings about her aunt's fire on cool spring evenings, and to enjoy once more the brilliancy of Benjamin's repartee.

" The Benjamins are not tired of each other. The indifference they manifest for society proves it. They might seek and find more means of entertainment. . . . Our dinner and our At Home Sunday was delightful. . . . Benjamin was very amusing. . . . We were entertained at Constance's—the Benjamins too—and all appeared to be the best friends in the world. . . . We had a game of Commerce, for the d'Arlens must always have a little game. We were gay and lively. Benjamin has been very agreeable at several evening parties. However, if they prolong their stay, they will have to have better lodgings. I will not say anything about the

[1] Nearly all entailed, as she had a son by her first marriage.

1811 sojourn of the Terrible Lady here. She conducted herself just as usual, and has departed, thank God ! . . . To-morrow Mme. de Nassau is coming to lunch, and I begged Benjamin to read us a little of his manuscript book. It is time that I had this pleasure, after having heard so much about it." (To Charles, March 22 and 25.)

When, in May 1811, Benjamin finally set off on the long-discussed journey to Germany, he was really bidding adieu not only to Lausanne but to the entire Coppet circle about which his life had centred for nearly seventeen years, and entering upon a totally different environment from that in which his tastes had hitherto lain. The journey to Westphalia, where he and Charlotte were to be the guests of her brother at Hardenburg Castle, was made by slow stages. The roads were " infernal," and their luggage was so jolted about that the manuscript of the celebrated *History of Religions* was scattered along the highway, and its illustrious author was obliged to descend from his carriage to collect his *esprit* and to tie it up as best he could. The roads, besides being rough, were dangerous, infested by thieves, not professionals, but wretched peasants whose lands had been devastated by war and who were dying of hunger. For Napoleon was still engaged in presenting to the world " the superb spectacle " of his ambitious scheme to " lead the human race back to the true principles of civilization, from the Spree to the Tagus and from the Vistula to the Zuyder Zee." " The Government fights hunger with the gallows," wrote Benjamin, " but it has not decided which of those two moral powers will win out, and meanwhile already some travellers have been killed." It was seven years since Benjamin had been over this road, and he now for the first time was seeing the country with the eyes of a tourist. Nothing is more characteristic of his extreme *malléabilité* than the ease with which this usually indifferent traveller allowed himself to fall in with Charlotte's Teutonic enthusiasms and zeal for sight-seeing. " I am lazy and indifferent by nature," he wrote Rosalie, " but I enjoy having other people curious, and in order not to discourage them, I follow in their wake."

At Berne, over whose beauties Charlotte was in ecstasies, they went to the theatre, which afforded him a text for one of his favourite comparisons between French and German taste : " French actors are affected in the direction of pomposity, and German in the direction of sentimentality. The first walk on stilts, and the others like to be lulled to sleep on clouds ! " At Bâle they were entertained by friends of Charlotte's in typical German style :

"[Our friends] continue to take us to walk in the country, which 1811
seems the great and only diversion of the inhabitants of Bâle. The country is less beautiful than many parts of Switzerland. Only the Rhine is superb. You get attached to it as to a person, and I perceive that I am going to be sorry to leave it. I think the swiftness of its course inspires the respect that you feel for a man of genius absorbed in a great idea. To see it hurrying along so, with all its might, you would say that it was hastening to put some noble enterprise into execution. Alas! after having rolled its waves so majestically, it goes and loses itself in the sands of Holland; yet as long as it lasts it is very beautiful, and I have learned to content myself with people as long as they last. . . . We have been to see the library, where there are pictures by Holbein which are a better exposition of the Gospels than all the theological books in the world. There are two or three panels in the picture of the Passion, which penetrate the secret places of the soul with their religion. I am inclined to prefer painting to all literary composition, perhaps because it does without words, which are a torture, for they spoil everything which they express." (To Rosalie, Bâle, June 4, 1811.)

The sight-seeing was continued at Strasburg, and it is typical of Benjamin that he was less impressed by the famous cathedral, "rock-like in its massiveness and aerial in its structure," than by the recently disinterred body of a little girl buried three hundred years before, which lay in perfect state of preservation, roses on her skull, and rings on the hands which were crossed on her breast. "Before these infantile features, unaged by the lapse of centuries, I stood for an hour, wrapt in meditation on the mystery of death." While awaiting the arrival from Paris of Charlotte's relatives, Count Fürstenstein, and Count Hardenberg, and of her son—all of whom were to join them at Frankfort and go with them to Cassel —they lingered in German watering-places, Baden, where they saw the King of Bavaria "always acting in one way and speaking in another, and ruined by debts and ennui"; Heidelberg, where the prisons, not the Castle, were the chief attraction; and Wiesbaden, where there were "nothing but sick people coming to be cured and soldiers going to be killed, the latter being far surer of getting what they sought." The temptation of the casinos in all these places was irresistible, and he "gambled like a madman and lost like a fool." Only the arrival of Charlotte's family saved him from utter ruin. He was delighted with his stepson, a fine, handsome fellow of twenty, who adored his mother, and who was already on the road to an honourable military career. It was August when the party finally reached Cassel, the home of the Hardenbergs.

1811 The new kingdom of Westphalia, created by Napoleon out of twenty small German states, had been organized by him under a superior system of administration "made in France," and with Jerome Bonaparte for its King. The Court was at Cassel, and was as far as possible a reproduction of the splendours and ceremonies that the Emperor demanded at his own Court. The immorality and extravagance which accompanied all this state, was, according to Talleyrand, a cause of scandal to the serious-minded people of the neighbouring university town of Göttingen. The inmates of the castle of Hardenburg, however, enjoyed the gaieties afforded by the proximity of the Court, without participating too much in its lapses from approved standards. Charlotte's brother, Count Hardenberg, who now occupied it, had formerly been Minister of Police in Cassel, but now enjoyed the post of Grand Master of the Hounds under the Napoleonic dispensation, and passed his time in hunting and in attendance upon the Court. One of his three daughters was married to the Prime Minister of the Court. "You can imagine," Benjamin wrote his aunt, "that in the midst of these new relatives I do not talk much of Jacqueline [the name they had adopted for Napoleon in their correspondence, to elude the Censor], and of what concerns her. I would not venture to introduce such petty affairs into conversation! But my manner of judging this young lady has not changed and will not change."

The Castle was ancient, and was overlooked by the ruins of a still older edifice, and it boasted such romantic relics of family tradition as a bloodstained rock where some high-spirited ancestress had jumped from her window to escape union with the man who had killed her lover. Count Hardenburg's wife (whose grief over the recent death of her two sons had caused her to draw into herself and shun society) opened her heart to her new brother-in-law, and urged him to remain at the Castle all winter. This would have pleased Charlotte, for after her years of lurking in seclusion at the whim of Mme. de Staël, the gaiety of the little Court was most acceptable. She was delighted to see her husband so contented, with his regular hours of work during the day, and a greater liveliness in his periods of recreation than she had ever perceived in him before. In September, he described his life at the Castle to Fauriel:

"I am here . . . in the midst of a rather beautiful country, with people who have much more family affection than is fashionable with us; with a wife to whom I am every day more attached because every day she is kinder to me; and near the finest library

in Europe. All this goes to make a much more agreeable situation 1811
than it seems that one has a right to in the times in which we are living. I am profiting by it to repose after so many past agitations and to work as much as possible. I hope this winter to finish the work that has occupied me so many years. I have here all that is necessary for it. There is not a book of the slightest use to me which is not at my service, and the librarians are the most obliging people in the world. This university, I mean Göttingen, has on the material side gained rather than lost by all the revolutions which have agitated this corner of Europe. The present Government has devoted large sums to completing the library in all its departments. They endeavour as much as possible to separate science and letters from all which pertains to politics, and every kind of social organization; I make no comment on this system, but they act as if this end were already attained, and they protect letters as if they were already in that very happy state of independence of all human agitations. So the establishments are superb as magazines of instruction. There is everything that interests me in my researches in the ancient religions. . . .

"I do not speak to you of public affairs because I neither read nor see any papers. There is not the smallest scrap of a French paper either here or at Göttingen, except the *Moniteur*, which they get in bales every six months, which does not render the news it contains very fresh. All the more on this account I live with my Egyptians and my Scandinavians, who sometimes seem to be my contemporaries when I find absurd opinions or gross customs among them. In this sense there is always a way of finding oneself again at home.

"If the demon of procrastination does not seize you, you certainly ought to give me some news, as quickly as you can. . . . My wife sends you salutations and commends to you her English Shakespeare. I do not know when I shall make use of it, for I think I am here for the winter, and who knows to-day what he will be and where he will be in six months, without counting the comet, which, they say, is going to reduce our little globe to ashes. While we are waiting for it to reunite us, my dear Fauriel, remember that we are separated and that I love you, and that you will give me a keen pleasure by writing to me."

But even the mild distractions of Cassel and Hardenberg proved unfavourable to the studious habits he had promised himself, and the 3rd of November the Constants moved into an apartment in Göttingen. Benjamin tried to persuade Charlotte to remain with her family, for Hardenberg was but a short distance from Göttingen, and he foresaw that she would be lonely while he was so closely occupied with his books, but she loyally accompanied him, and shared with him the rigours of a German winter and of society

1811 in a German university town. Snow fell early, and Benjamin soon discovered that the conveniences of life in Göttingen were not as well regulated as those of the intellect. He complained of being badly lodged and badly fed, and shared the sentiments of a French traveller who had marvelled at the eccentricities of this country where " the houses are of wood and the beds are of stone." And, notwithstanding the numerous introductions to the professors with which Charlotte's friends had provided him, he came to the conclusion that the academic circles of Göttingen were as frigid as its climate. The inspiration he had anticipated from the environment of a German university was wholly lacking. The scholars and professors struck him as dried-up bookworms, devoid of broad, intellectual interests outside of their studies or laboratories. They were as buried in their books as the people of the Court were immersed in their pleasures, and there was no " atmosphere " whatever.

" Life is all on the inside here. The professors live apart even from each other. They work all day, then smoke *en famille*, listening to the idle gossip of their wives, who are merely housewives. The students study, then gamble, drink, sing and fight. This city of five hundred thousand people might blow up without a professor lifting his eyes from his work." (To Hochet, Göttingen, October 11, 1811.)

To Barante he wrote in a similar vein :

" The existence of the educated men is so ideal that they never speak of it. When they meet it is to forget all that occupied them. . . . Existence then is silence in repose, for their solitude is silence in action. . . . They take no interest in any one who has not been dead at least two thousand years."

Villers was at that time a professor in the University, and Benjamin found in him his one relief from the dulness of Göttingen society. " He is doubly delightful on the background of Germany, where it is rare to find what we are accustomed to find in Paris, as far as liveliness and wit are concerned, and Villers, who is notable for that in Paris, is much more so among the scholars of Göttingen." Although " created to interpret Germany to the French," Villers was " doomed to interpret France to the Germans," and was giving a course of lectures on French literature which Benjamin started to attend, anticipating great enjoyment in hearing him set forth ideas which would have " scandalized the Sorbonne." But when he reached the Troubadours, Constant's ardour cooled and he

ceased to follow the course. " I have no love for our old poetry 1813
nor our chivalry nor anything which characterizes our ancestors," he wrote Barante. " They were artificial heroes, and Saint Louis was the only real person in French history, and he owed that to his religion ! "

But notwithstanding his disappointment in Göttingen, he remained there two winters—" living on like the Elysian shades "—and became so absorbed in his books that he finally concluded that the professors were not so wrong after all, and that to speak in general society about what you cared most for was to run the risk of killing your interest in it. He must have made a favourable impression there, for he attained the distinction of an honorary title and election to a learned society of Göttingen, on the strength of a book which was still unfinished, and which was not to be finished for fifteen years ! So long is Art in Germany ! This unwonted immobility was not without restless endeavours to break away and return to Switzerland, but Charlotte was struggling with the settlement of her father's estate and trying to obtain from her brothers large sums of principal and interest still due her. To the annoyances and repeated disappointments attendant upon this business was added the difficulty of obtaining passports, and in the disturbed condition into which Napoleon had thrown the entire continent, the Constants clung to the little oasis of peace which Westphalia offered, among all the warlike preparations of the other countries.

But even in Göttingen it was no longer possible to escape the commotion of the arming of the nations. While the placid professors continued to give their lectures on " men dead two thousand years," and their wives to meet at their tiresome whist-parties, and Benjamin struggled to bury his political ideals in studies of dead religions, there were passing through the quiet street of the town " the actors in the great piece " which was in preparation. " These actors are the cannon," he wrote. " They pass in silence. People watch them in silence—they do not question them for fear they will begin to answer. Their repartee is prompt and noisy. It is better to let them pass without explanation." From Switzerland came rumours of warlike enterprises which threatened beautiful St. Jean with conversion into fortifications. The career of " Jacqueline " appeared to be approaching its crisis. Prussia, Austria, Sweden, one after the other were coming into the Coalition formed by Russia and England, and Napoleon's artificial kingdoms were crumbling. In the summer of 1813 " the Benjamins " went

1813 to Brunswick, and thence to Hanover. There they saw the great drama at a closer range. Hanover was engaged in reviving its old government, which had been supplanted by the short-lived kingdom of Westphalia, and the race to get the high places amused the cynical Benjamin. "This country is very interesting, in its present circumstances, but in order for my letter to reach you, it behoves it not to be interesting," he wrote his aunt. "If it is desired, my dear aunt, Jacqueline's case is lost."

'When I think of this history," he wrote on August 7, "my blood boils, and I compose Memorials in my head. I hope that when we meet again, Jacqueline will be entirely expelled from the family. Till then there will be no repose for my uncle and the children."

And again, on September 30, he wrote from Brunswick:

"Jacqueline is very ill, they have tried various remedies, and she has been here and there at different Baths, but they do not think she will be able to return, and even should she get well immediately, she will have lost all her flesh and all the attractions of which she was so fond. You know how I detest coquetry in women; that of Jacqueline went beyond all bounds, so that I confess I have little sympathy for her."

It was a time of intense excitement, and Benjamin was waking from his long, enforced slumber. He had heard the réveillé of Liberty for France, and realized that the reign of Militarism was at an end. It was no longer necessary to talk of Jacqueline. The mask was discarded in his next letter.

"Napoleon has been beaten at Brienne, and has lost 12,000 prisoners and seventy-three pieces of cannon; there, on the very soil which he had devastated by the flail of war, he has met his defeat, and beside the institution to which he was appointed by the charity of Louis XVI., whom he replaced, and by the favour of M. Necker, whose daughter he has exiled. The military school, scene of his early youth, and the whole village where this school was, have been burned. . . . I have not allowed this great crisis to pass without at least doing what I could to speed its success. . . . I want to bear witness to my having always disapproved of the Revolution of 1798, and even opposed it at Paris as much as I could. But I find that in 1814 it is necessary to speak of pretended privileges which were only excusable because they had always existed, and that one risks, in attacking them, the burning of a very great edifice. Now that they have been overthrown, it is

no longer necessary to think of them. Many things which would have been good to keep are bad to re-establish." (February 12, 1814.) 1814

He was like an old war-horse at the smell of powder. All the old ambitions and ideals and enthusiasms which had drawn him to Paris with Mme. de Staël after the fall of Robespierre, revived at the impending downfall of this second despot. His passion for Liberty, the only real passion he ever knew, could no longer be smothered in dusty tomes and fumblings among ancient religions. Chateaubriand heralded the dawn by his pamphlet on Bonaparte, and Mme. de Staël was preparing her *Considérations sur la Révolution*; Benjamin wrote at a white heat his political masterpiece, *De l'Esprit de Conquête et de l'Usurpation*, and threw down the gauntlet to the tyrant he hated. He little dreamed how soon he would be persuaded to pick it up again!

CHAPTER XV

THE HUNDRED DAYS

(1814–1815)

ON the 29th of January 1814, Benjamin wrote Rosalie from Hanover:

"Since my last letter many things have happened, and the world has made many steps in advance. I personally have followed the general march. I will soon send you a little work which I have just published and which is purely a matter of duty and conscience. The credit of it is not due to myself alone; I was strongly urged to it by my friends and even by others."

This work was *De l'Esprit de Conquête*, and one of those who had urged him to take a part in this Renaissance of Liberty was Mme. de Staël. During her recent visit to Russia she had won the Czar's interest in some of her schemes in France, and she had then proceeded to Stockholm, where she had renewed her intimacy with Bernadotte, one time Marshal of the Empire, but now heir by election to the throne of Sweden. In the days of the Consulate she had taken part in a plot to put Bernadotte at the head of the French Government, and now that the fall of the despot was clearly imminent, she used her influence with the Czar in behalf of the Prince of Sweden as being one eminently fitted to restore liberty to France, and she also called his attention to the valuable assistance the able pen and tongue of Benjamin Constant could render to the cause. In the autumn of 1813 she began to stir up the slumbering political ardour of the student of the *History of Religions*: "Do you do nothing with that superior 'you' that you have taken away from me? The only action of your life will have been against me!" At her suggestion he went in December to confer with Bernadotte, then in command of the Army of the North, at his headquarters at Abo; but it was only after considerable hesitation and much argument that he

finally decided to throw in his lot with the "Béarnais."[1] "I 1813
feel that I am on alien ground," he wrote in the Journal. "His ground appears to me unstable, and my house built upon it will find itself on the sand."

To Villers—whose position at Göttingen he was trying to assure through Bernadotte and through his English acquaintances in Hanover—he wrote doubtfully:

"The Prince Royal continues to nibble the outposts of Davoust. He is eating the *hors d'œuvre* and the garnishings, but he has not attacked the body of the beast yet. . . . I have perfect confidence in his genius and in his excellent intentions. But I fear that his slowness makes me inappreciative of them. There is a chorus of complaint from one end of Germany to the other.' (Hanover, December 11, 1813.)

Nevertheless, in the lottery which the future disposition of the government of France now offered, one man's chance seemed as good as another's. The spectacular career of the Béarnais may have appealed to him as that of a hero favoured by fortune. Risen from the ranks to the command of the Army of the West in the Revolution, and made General-in-Chief, Ambassador, and Minister under the Directoire, the zenith of his military glory was reached in his three years' campaign with the Army of the Rhine. His failure to support Bonaparte on the 18th Brumaire put a term to this rapid rise, and the titles of Marshal of the Empire and Prince of Ponte Corvo were empty honours for the soldier who saw that his prestige with the Emperor was gone. But once more fortune had befriended him, for when the aged and childless King Charles XIII. of Sweden was obliged to find a successor for his throne, the choice fell on the General who had won such fame for the armies of France, and the Prince of Ponte Corvo became the Crown Prince of Sweden. On the death of the King, he was destined to ascend the throne as Charles XIV. and to establish his dynasty through his son. And time has vindicated him even with his own nation, for after suffering their abuse and ridicule for years, because he joined the Allies against his fatherland, his name is to-day engraved on the Arc de Triomphe as one of the liberators of France.

Benjamin had known him in the Constitutional Club in the days of the Directoire, and has described his "*gasconades* and chimeras," his eloquence, his theatrical and pompous address, his picturesque vocabulary, his gascon twang and dramatic

[1] So-called from his birthplace, Béarn.

1814 gestures. Excitable, loquacious, extravagant, boastful, Quixotic, —he has been called a combination of all the gascon heroes from Cyrano de Bergerac to D'Artagnan. "A French head on a Roman heart," said Napoleon. To such a man, who combined military astuteness with the qualities that make a popular hero,—one whom Mme. de Staël called "the noblest and best ever called to rule"—if a regent was to be sought for the young son of the abdicating Emperor of France, or if a Consulate was again to be adopted, or even in the event of a Bourbon Restoration, it was more than possible that those who had honoured him once should do so again. And on the wave of Bernadotte's popularity Benjamin hoped to be lifted to an honourable position in the regenerated France.

The last of January Bernadotte arrived in Hanover,[1] and after several dinners and two long private interviews, when, notwithstanding the jealousy of his *entourage*, the Prince received Mme. de Staël's former favourite with flattering consideration. Benjamin made a "bold proposition" to him, which doubtless outlined their joint action in relation to the new Government to be proposed by them for France. Bernadotte's reply to this was to invite Benjamin to join him on the march to Paris, and the pamphlet, *De l'Esprit de Conquête*, was prepared for immediate publication in England and France, with special reference to the Prince. "Time presses if I am to arrive in time for the 'Hallelujah!'" Constant said. As it turned out, the leader with whom he had concluded to cast in his lot was himself too late for the "Hallelujah," and once again he was destined to be on the losing side. But the pamphlet was completed while his hopes were still high, and its author pronounced it good. "The monster's name is not once mentioned, but I think he has never been so well analysed and shown so vile and odious," he wrote Villers. So bold was the arraignment that he was half afraid to put his name to it, in spite of the rumours floating about Hanover that Bonaparte had been assassinated at the Opera. But he finally decided to sign it, and to send a copy to Alexander of Russia, upon whom all eyes were just then turned as the saviour of Christendom.

The Paris edition of this important pamphlet [2] appeared too late

[1] Barante says Constant went to Stockholm to see him; another authority reports Bernadotte as going to Göttingen to see Constant!

[2] In 1910 it was reprinted by a distinguished descendant of Benjamin's half-sister, Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, Senator of France and delegate to the Peace Conference at The Hague; and again in 1918, in the series called *Topics of the Week*, with an introduction by Albert Thomas. During the last war it was several times quoted, and once, at least, by an Italian journal.

(April 22) to have any appreciable effect on the course of events ; 1814
but the first edition, which came out in Hanover in January, was widely read and greatly admired. An English edition, with a preface by Mme. de Staël, was published in London in March, and a friend, Professor Troeken of Göttingen, undertook to translate it into German. The Paris edition was speedily exhausted, and in the summer he put out a fourth edition, with two new chapters, in answer to some criticisms, in which he pleaded for " evolution versus revolution " with his characteristic tolerance.

Barante has said that Constant never wrote anything more sincerely and forcibly than *De l'Esprit de Conquête et de l'Usurpation* : " At this time he was animated by a conviction which without doubt weakened." Barante, being unable to follow Constant's political progressions after his hatred for Bonaparte modified, was inclined to discount the sincerity of his later position. His praise of this pamphlet is justified by the freshness and vividness it brings to a theme with which we are much occupied to-day. It is a brilliant and vigorous plea for peace, and an arraignment of war and militarism as incompatible with the social and commercial institutions of an advanced civilization. It contained arguments against war which were not only new but bold and dangerous to utter. Many passages are so strangely modern and sadly significant, viewed in the light of the present upheaval of the world, that a long quotation may be excusable. Constant shows that although there have been epochs in the world's development when war was advantageous and even uplifting, it is harmful and degrading to society as it now is organized. For whereas the great wars of the Ancients were the result of the national situation and the temper of the people, and

" Each nation of old formed one isolated family, born the enemy of other families ; to-day we have one body of men—under different names and diverse kinds of social organizations, to be sure—but homogeneous by its nature. It is sufficiently strong to have nothing to fear from barbarous hordes. It is sufficiently civilized for war to be a burden to it. Its tendency is toward peace. . . . We have arrived at the epoch of commerce, an epoch which is necessarily bound to take the place of the epoch of war, as that of war was necessarily bound to precede it. War and commerce are but two different ways of arriving at the same end —that of obtaining what one wants. . . . The modern manner of fighting, the changes made in arms, in artillery, have despoiled military life of its greatest attraction. It is no longer a struggle against danger ; it is nothing but fatality. . . .

1814 "If a purely military race should be produced now, since its zeal would not rest upon any conviction, upon any thought, upon any sentiment, as all the causes of exaltation which formerly ennobled even carnage would be strangers to it—it would adopt the fierceness of the warrior spirit, but it would preserve the calculating spirit of commercialism. These resuscitated Vandals would not possess that ignorance of luxury, that simplicity of habit, that disdain of every low action which would have characterized their rougher predecessors. They would join to the brutality of the barbarian the refinements of effeminacy; to the excesses of violence the tricks of greed. . . . Four hundred thousand egoists, well trained, well armed, would know that their destiny was to inflict or to suffer death. They would calculate that it was more profitable to resign themselves to their destiny than to shun it, because the tyranny that condemned them to it was stronger than they. For consolation they would turn their attention to the promised reward, the pillage of those against whom they were led. . . . Their acquaintance with the forms of law would give to their injustices the insensibility of law; their acquaintance with social forms would spread over their cruelties the veneer of carelessness and lightness which they would deem elegance; they would thus run over the world, turning the progress of civilization against itself, entirely in their own interest; separated by a moral abyss from the rest of the human race, and united among themselves no more than a pack of wild beasts would be, who cast themselves upon helpless hordes. . . .

"When a people is naturally warlike, the authority which rules them has no need to deceive them in order to lead them into war. Attila pointed out to his Huns with his finger the part of the world on which they were to fall, and they would rush there because Attila was the spokesman and representative of their impulses. But in our day, war not being a source of advantage to people, but only a source of deprivation and suffering, the ruler, even while absorbed in gigantic projects, dares not say to the nation, 'Let us march to the Conquest of the World!' The nation would respond with one voice, 'We do not desire the Conquest of the World!' But the Government would talk of national independence, of national honour, of the straightening of its frontiers, of commercial interest, of precautions dictated by foresight—of what else?—for it is inexhaustible, the vocabulary of hypocrisy and injustice! It would speak of national independence as if the independence of a nation were compromised because other nations are independent! . . . Under the pretext of precautions dictated by foresight, this Government would attack its most peaceable neighbours, its most humble allies, on the plea of suspecting hostile projects, and of anticipating meditated aggressions. If the unfortunate objects of their attacks were easily subjugated, it would boast of having anticipated them; if they had the time and strength to

resist; '*You see!*' it would cry. '*They wanted war, for they are* 1814
defending themselves!' . . .

"Strange reversal produced in the action of authority by a system of conquest! For twenty years you have recommended to these same men sobriety, attachment to their families, diligence in their work. But the world must be invaded! They are seized, led away, excited to scorn of the virtues long since taught them. They are stupefied with drink; they are excited by debauch. . . . That is what they call stirring up public spirit!" [1]

De l'Esprit de Conquête was very popular in Paris as well as elsewhere, and remains one of the best things that Constant ever wrote. Nevertheless, after his connection with the Hundred Days, he was disposed to depreciate it as being a mere piece of "occasional" writing—"gunshots," he said, "at errors and abuses"—and he omitted it from the collection of his political writings which he made in 1818. But far from possessing a merely fugitive value, it remains to-day as subtle and forcible, and alas! as timely, in its exposure of the havoc wrought upon enlightenment and civilization by force and militarism, as it was one hundred years ago.

It may appear a strange error of judgment that had led Benjamin to view with seriousness the chimerical ambitions of Bernadotte, which rested on so slight a basis that we have almost forgotten to-day that they were ever entertained. Nevertheless, it is possible that the "important papers," by means of which he had been won to the party of "the Béarnais," included a part-promise from the Russian potentate who was supposed just then to hold the future of France in the hollow of his hand. And not only had Alexander hinted that a regency for Bernadotte might be the reward of the assistance of Sweden's soldier-prince and his army, but there was a party in Paris who favoured this arrangement. Even when the news came that Louis had been summoned to the throne of France, Bernadotte still had a hope of being called to the aid of his country, and went on to Brussels. Benjamin continued with him, loyal, yet speculating: "I would give the devil to know why and the outcome of all this!"

An undated Memorial, drawn up in Constant's handwriting, was in all probability prepared by him for Bernadotte's use. Four possible solutions of the problem now facing the Allies are considered in it: peace with Napoleon, or the return of the Bourbons at the call of France—both to be avoided; the establishment of a Liberal Constitution under an "illustrious head"; or the proclama-

[1] From Chapters II., IV., VIII., IX.

1814 tion of Napoleon II. under the auspices of " a Republican destined for the throne of Sweden." He also prepared a Proclamation, vesting all decisions in an improvised body, to be composed in part of deputies who had been "*arbitrarily expelled from the Tribunat in 1803*," which should have power to treat with the European Allies and, if necessary, with the Bourbons, and could even dethrone Napoleon. It closed with this sentiment : " The hero has but to stamp his foot and anarchy will disappear and the French people will revive." This is probably the document which Mme. de Staël gave to the Austrian Ambassador in London, who, she wrote, conceded the genius of its author, but did not understand how the father could be expelled without retaining the son. " Every one agrees with you about the Regency," she wrote ; " but the fact is that once Bonaparte is overthrown the old Government will be re-established."

And so it proved. Alexander and his allies were wholly unprepared for the Bourbon enthusiasm which met them on entering Paris after the battle of March 30. White cockades, thoughtfully distributed about the streets by Talleyrand, everywhere had replaced the tricolor. Yet even then, if Bernadotte had risked more he might have stood as good a chance, at least with the Allies, as Louis *le Désiré* himself. But his repugnance to appearing to enter his native land in company with its foreign conquerors, added to his fear of losing the throne of Sweden too, if he staked too much, held him back until it was too late for him to count, and while the allied armies were driving Napoleon's generals back under the very walls of Paris, Bernadotte, with the Army of the North, lingered at Liège, making speeches to the French prisoners and governors of the forts, and decorating Benjamin with the Order of the Polar Star ! By the time that he had decided to join the assembly of victorious monarchs and generals in Paris, he had ceased to be accounted a factor in the overthrow of the Empire. Amid the Bourbon demonstrations he had been entirely forgotten, and the position of mediator he had dreamed of filling was occupied by the Czar of Russia. At the Council held to consider a successor for Napoleon, Alexander, to be sure, had remembered his promise sufficiently to suggest Bernadotte's name, half-heartedly, to Talleyrand (who with his customary agility had again landed himself safely), but he was silent at the reply, " If a soldier, why not the greatest of soldiers ? " And so, deserted, and forgotten, the Prince of Sweden quietly left Paris, almost as soon as he arrived.

Before he left Brussels, Benjamin had recognized the hopeless-

ness of Bernadotte's cause, and on the 14th of April (the very day 1814
that the French Senate, in the Pavillon de Marsan, was extracting from Monsieur a promise that his brother would accept the *Charte*), he wrote Villers :

" Behold, then, my dear Villers, the great tragedy ended by a parody as dirty, so far as the haughty actor was concerned, as the tragedy was bloody. The man of Destiny, the Attila of our time, he before whom the earth was silent, did not know how to die ! I had always said it, but was never believed ; and the whole world stands amazed.

" For the rest, the outlook is tolerable if it lasts. We are promised liberty of Religion, and of the Press. At that price, the National Representation will certainly go for the Bourbons. But so far it is the Senate that speaks, and behind are those masses, eager to make a noise, who rush in headlong, according to their habit. The Emperor of Russia is the only man at this juncture upon whose magnanimity the soul can rely. Without him, this noble French nation would establish the government of the Turks."

On the 24th of May, Benjamin wrote his aunt :

" The Prince of Sweden is no longer here. He left some time ago. It was a mistake to represent me as his private secretary. He invited me to join him and I did so, first because I like him very much and second because I wanted to do all that one individual could to co-operate in whatever was for the interests of all individuals and of all nations. If I have not accomplished much it is not because I did not desire to."

" Nevertheless, I am having difficulty to recover from the idiotic collapse of the Béarnais," he admitted in his Journal.[1]

When he finally determined to follow the fortunes of Bernadotte, Benjamin had left his wife to enjoy the gaieties of Hanover under the protection of her son, while he accompanied the Army of the North in its leisurely advance through Belgium. At Louvain he was joined by Auguste de Staël, who came armed with a letter from his mother, so full of schemes and intrigues, Benjamin indignantly declared, that it dispelled the " last vestiges of illusion about her." And when his hopes for Bernadotte were destroyed, seeing nothing

[1] Béranger said that Constant did not like to be reminded that he came to Paris in the train of Bernadotte. When the Memorial of St. Helena appeared (December 1817), whose authorship was often ascribed to Constant, he said to Béranger : " Bernadotte is trying to have some pages of the Memorial of St. Helena struck out. If he succeeds, I will say the best possible things to you about it."

1814 better to do, he went on to Paris with Auguste de Staël in Bernadotte's travelling carriage, wondering what he would do when he arrived in Paris, where he plainly had now no party to join. "Besides, just now the nation is like mud; it is stirred up, we must let it alone, and wait until the water becomes clear," he wrote. But he was too vitally interested in the work of reconstruction to allow himself to be left out of it, and as soon as he had secured quarters at the Hôtel Vauban on rue St. Honoré, he lost no time in recalling himself to all who were just then in position to need him. He at once called upon Talleyrand, put himself in the way of all invitations from people of influence, and obtained an interview with Alexander through the former tutor of the Czar, that La Harpe whose schemes for a Vaudois Revolution he and Mme. de Staël had coldly rejected. At the end of ten days he wrote cheerfully to Villers:

"The public disposition is good. That of the Princes replaced upon the throne is excellent. Opinion is roused. . . . Talleyrand's cleverness and wisdom are wonderful. . . . The length of my stay here depends upon events, or rather upon the direction that opinion takes. . . . I am very hopeful, but it is possible that my hopes may be disappointed." (April 21, 1814.)

To his aunt he wrote in the same optimistic vein:

"It is impossible for any one to be more moderate than Monsieur, and if the barkers, who pass from one party to the other in order always to bark louder than the leaders, do not spoil the present disposition, there is reason for great satisfaction and hopefulness.

"It is certainly a great mercy, this downfall of Napoleon, whom it is no longer necessary, thank God, to speak of as Jacqueline. But what did you say to the *dénouement*? Were ever more baseness and more insolence united? You must have seen that he bargained for as much money as he could get, demanded his wine, his carriages given back to him. This master of the world revenged himself for our revolt by degrading us still more when he showed of what a scoundrel we had been the slaves. He thought that the human race was not worth giving the satisfaction of a heroic death on his part. He has gone, it is said, for that is not quite certain, to the Island of Elba, where he will bear, according to the treaty, the title of Emperor. Thank God, there is now some land where one can go without being in his empire!" (April 20, 1814.)

The distaste of the Parisians for the foreign occupation was not shared by this cosmopolitan. The spectacle of savage Cossacks, with their outlandish uniforms and weapons, bivouacking in the streets of Paris, which so outraged the patriotism of Mme. de Staël,

merely amused him by its picturesqueness. His interview with 1814
the Czar was promising. Alexander proposed to bestow an Order upon him, in reward for *De l'Esprit de Conquête*, and not unnaturally Benjamin thought him a fine man and, were it not for the formalities with which his courtiers hedged him in, one with whom it was possible to enjoy full liberty and confidence. This judgment was doubtless correct, for had Alexander been less susceptible to the influence of stronger characters, his natural disposition was simple and tolerant. But while waiting for the Russian Order (which, by the way, the Czar forgot to send), and dining with Don Pedro, and meeting Wellington at Mme. de Staël's, Benjamin did not neglect the society of the patriots who had been his friends in the days of the Directoire. He dined frequently with Raynouard, with Fouché, with Talleyrand,[1] with Beugnot (the future Minister of Police), with Sebastiani.[2] He frequented the drawing-rooms of Garat, of Suard, and of course of Mme. de Staël, who had lost no time in returning to Paris as soon as her arch-enemy had fallen.

"Suard does not age, and his wife is still as young as at fifteen and as naïve as a virgin," he wrote Villers. "Hochet is begetting children. Prosper is at Nantes, serving his own ambition, which does not prevent his serving to the best of his ability. . . . The English overwhelm us and make themselves detested. Lord Wellington displays with decency a great reputation on a background of mediocrity. He gives balls to four thousand people. During the week every one says he won't go to pay court to a man who has humiliated Frenchmen; when the day approaches they all struggle for tickets, and the next day those who did not get them say that they declined." (November 26, 1814.)

In order to demonstrate his intention of remaining a French citizen under the restored dynasty, Constant purchased a house

[1] The day after the recall of the Bourbons he wrote Talleyrand: "You have solved an enigma gloriously, and . . . I cannot resist the desire to thank you for having at the same time crushed tyranny and laid the foundations of liberty. . . . To escape a yoke which I could not break, I had left France, and although I may be drawing back to her in order to try to serve her, ties which I cherish tend to hold me elsewhere. But it is pleasant to express one's admiration for a man who is at the same time the saviour and the most delightful of Frenchmen." (Talleyrand, *Mémoires*.)

[2] General and Marshal of France, compatriot of Bonaparte, and Deputy for Corsica, 1819–24. He then replaced General Foy, and in 1830 was given the Portfolio of foreign affairs. One of the leaders of the Liberals Thureau-Dangin has described him, "with his affectations of elegance, his studied poses, his dreadful white gloves, his artistically arranged hair, type of a diplomat, rather than a warrior."

1814 on the rue Neuve de Berry (No. 6). On leaving for Germany he had sold Les Herbages, giving as his reason Charlotte's dislike of the place. " If the little Corsican whose end has been so theatrical had taken me into his confidence," he now wrote Rosalie, " I would not have sold my little estate—everything, my furniture and the largest part of my library." The death of Mme. de Nassau had removed the last motive for his making a home in Switzerland. " I have lost an aged relative whom I loved, and for whom I have mourned," he wrote Villers. " I thought she would leave me a large part of her fortune, and she left me very little, and I mourn for my inheritance." [1] In all probability the stories of his gambling had determined Mme. de Nassau not to leave her property to her favourite nephew, but he at once proceeded to console himself for this disappointment by returning to the vice, and with the money thus won, it is said, to buy his new house—" in one of the finest localities in Paris," he wrote Villers, " on the loveliest street in the world, and surrounded by green grass." He proceeded to put it in order for Charlotte, who was soon expected, but she could not get through the lines of the Allies, and in November he is still expecting her.[2] It was two years before they met again.

In support of the ideals of Liberty which he professed, Benjamin now consecrated himself to the task of " teaching representative government to France," a lesson which France was slow to learn, for at the end of his life he was still trying to teach it. The principles of parliamentary government were not generally known in France until he expounded them. During the next four years he was producing that remarkable series of pamphlets and newspaper articles which contained the substance of the political principles whose recognition was the objective of his public life. Fruit of his study and meditation in the solitude of exile, they are

[1] Mme. de Nassau died in May 1814. The following letter from Mme. de Staël, dated April 7, 1815, in Nolde, must belong to 1814: " How painful it is to see a man like you behave so foolishly through love of gambling. You know that sooner or later your aunt will disinherit you for this, and you have no fear at your age that every one will say you were quite willing. There is no more reason than dignity in this, and God grant that the need of money all your life may not expiate your momentary passion."

[2] That same month he wrote Rosalie, who, in common with the other relatives, was suspicious about this prolonged separation, that he was going to Hanover the following month to " get two things " he had left there, *i.e.* his wife and his book (*Religions*). In December he writes he is detained in Paris by business, but that she will start " after the first of the year." Of course communications through the Allied line were difficult, but undoubtedly there were other obstacles.

inspired by his great admiration of the English Constitution and 1814
a profound knowledge of the principles on which it rests, and expressed with that clearness and incisiveness so characteristic of his written style, even more than of his spoken discourses. Every important measure or controversy in the next fifteen years was the signal for a pamphlet, and through him the thoughtful and intelligent, as well as the masses of the people, were instructed in truths which had long been ignored or misunderstood, and which now became familiar and intelligible to every one. His collected works furnish a complete exposition of the theories of Constitutional Law, and the substance of political philosophy.

Immediately after his arrival in Paris appeared an article by him in the *Journal des Débats* (April 21) discussing the doctrine upon which every Constitutional monarchy must be based—that of the Neutrality of the Throne—with a view to educating the people in the principles of parliamentary government. This prepared the way for *Réflexions sur les Constitutions et les Garanties*,[1] in the form, for convenience, of a sketch of a Constitution, which was inspired by Louis' declaration at St. Ouen, promising a Liberal Constitution to France. The Censor objected to it because discussion of the new Constitution was unnecessary : " If it is accepted by the King, nothing should be written against it ; if it is rejected, nothing need be written for it," he notified the printer. Although an appeal to superior authority overruled the Censor, the incident furnished the text for his lifelong battle in behalf of a free Press, which was inaugurated by a pamphlet on *La Liberté des Brochures*.[2]

Les Réflexions sur les Constitutions specified the elements of government which would ensure freedom for the nation. Responsibility of the ministers, neutrality of the throne, a hereditary peerage, an unpaid representative body, trial by jury, a free Press, religious freedom and a constitution so supple and free that it would have full opportunity for growth and development are some of the guarantees of Liberty which were his watchwords for the next fifteen years. " The liberties of the people are the columns which support the throne, and when these liberties are overthrown, the

[1] Published May 24. Revised and reprinted by Constant in the 1818 edition of his collected works, *Cours de Politique Constitutionnelle*.

[2] *De la Liberté des Brochures, des Pamphlets, et des Journaux, considerée sous le rapport de l'interêt du Gouvernement*. First and second editions, 1814 ; third edition, 1818. (The second edition contains a discussion of the history of the liberty of the Press in England.)

1814 throne also will find itself overturned." [1] How far it was from Louis' intention to secure the stability of his throne by strengthening these supports, the first act of his ministers soon made clear, when Montesquiou introduced their first Bill. The *Charte*, by grace of which he was supposed to reign, provided for a limited freedom of the Press; that is, it permitted the Government to *correct* abuses of the privilege of free speech in the Press. The new Bill, in the preparation of which Montesquiou had the assistance of his young secretary, François Guizot, and of Royer-Collard, who had been an agent of the King during his exile, was aimed directly at this newly established liberty. By pretending to interpret the word "correct" in the sense of "forestall" or "prevent," the Bill maintained in reality the strictest censorship on all newspapers and periodicals, although excepting books of more than twenty pages; and this open defiance of the spirit in which the Bourbons had been recalled aroused much dissatisfaction. Benjamin at once flew to the rescue with a pamphlet [2] examining the speech of Montesquiou upon the Bill and picking out the weak points in the minister's reasoning with unsparing sarcasm. In justification of his measure, Montesquiou had pointed to the flourishing condition of French literature, in spite of censorship, in the reign of Louis XIV. To which Constant rejoined:

"In reading this eloquent homage paid to the literary glory of France, I ask myself if the objection the minister refutes is really the one which has been offered. It seems to me not to have been a question of whether a people can make itself illustrious by literary masterpieces under the system of censorship, but of whether a people can be free when men appointed by authority have the power to check the expression of thought, . . . in a word, all which relates to the maintenance of individual liberty. . . . The censors are not to be appointed, as I understand, to see that the rules of epic poetry and the three unities of tragedy are carefully observed. Their jurisdiction will be of an entirely different nature. It is against the abuse of this jurisdiction that alarmed minds should have been reassured."

Lafayette compared the brilliancy and force of this pamphlet, which passed through two editions, to the style of the *Lettres*

[1] This idea was amplified in *De La Responsabilité des Ministres* (February 1, 1815), which was, for the most part, re-embodied in his *Principes de Politique* (June 10, 1818). When this pamphlet appeared, Hobhouse wrote, "*The Responsibility* is reckoned a mine of newly discovered truths."

[2] *Observations sur le discours de Son Excellence le Ministre de l'Intérieur, en faveur du projet de Loi sur la Liberté de la Presse.* First and second editions, 1814; third edition, 1818.

Provinciales, and Benjamin could well feel that it had added to the renown that *De l'Esprit de Conquête* had brought him. Nevertheless, after great opposition, which prolonged the debate for three months, the Ministry finally got their Bill passed. "Good-bye to the Constitution, and to the devil with France! What fools of rulers, who thus kill public opinion, which was on their side!" wrote Benjamin in his Journal. That night he dined at Raynouards' and had a hot dispute with Guizot on the subject; and from there went to Suard's, where he found everybody in agreement with him that a Counter-Revolution was in full blast. And indeed it had not needed the triumph of the Censorship Bill to make that apparent. When, on the 4th of June, the new Parliament had convened and the so-called Constitutional Charter had been read to the assembled members of both Houses, the concluding words of the Act, "Given, in the nineteenth year of our reign," struck the knell of Benjamin's hope for a Liberal Government by their insistence upon the principle of legitimacy rather than that of the will of the people who had recalled Louis, as the King's title to rule them. So there was little chance that the services of the opponent of Legitimacy and Prerogative would be solicited now, any more than they had been under the Emperor. Benjamin's sketch of a Constitution, which had appeared too late to influence public sentiment perceptibly, had nevertheless met with a success which, to his glee, infuriated Montesquiou, and made its author the lion of Suard's soirées. Renewed attentions from Talleyrand flattered his vanity somewhat, but at Mme. de Staël's small and select dinners, to which the legitimists, returned *émigrés*, foreign diplomats and generals, who made brilliant her larger gatherings, were not invited, he met men of the political calibre of Lafayette, who shared his suspicions of the Ministry and confirmed his fears of a Counter-Revolution. But those at the head of the Government blundered on, and those who distrusted it knew not how to check it, while no one had the wit to consult the one great specialist who might have helped them. 1814

In 1820 Benjamin wrote *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*, in which he ascribed the speedy collapse of the Bourbon rule in 1815 to the failure of the Ministry to win the people's confidence, rather than to any great popular enthusiasm for Bonaparte. He quoted the Emperor as saying to him:

"I came unheralded, without any conspiracies, with no preparation, holding in my hand the newspapers of Paris, the speech

1815 of M. de Ferrand. When I saw what they wrote about the army, the national property, about the straight path and the crooked path, I said to myself, 'France is mine!'"

Upon the haughtiness of the old nobility toward the nobility of the Empire, the intolerance and aggressions of the clergy, the indiscretions of Marshal Soult in outraging the sacred military traditions of the people, the undiplomatic measures of the Ministry, and the attacks of the ultra-Royalist papers on every disposition of the throne to conciliate the Liberal element in the nation, he threw the blame for the success which crowned the bold enterprise of the escaped prisoner from Elba.

A few days after Benjamin and Lafayette, meeting at the Duchess of Beaumont's ball, had agreed that the future looked very dark and that the Government evidently had no need of their services, Benjamin was approached by Lainé, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, who reassured him as to his possibilities of usefulness to the nation, and promised to see that his articles were published. The first article which he wrote after this assurance was promptly struck out by the Censor. Shortly afterward there was a rumour that Bonaparte had landed on the southern coast of France. The next day there were more rumours; the *rentes* fell, the Bourse was disturbed, the Chambers, which had been prorogued, were reassembled by a Royal Proclamation, and all loyal subjects were called upon to arrest Bonaparte. At once the facile pen of Constant was called into use, and the *Journal de Paris* printed a letter by him, fiercely attacking the man who had thus broken faith with his conquerors.

"He quitted French soil. Who would have supposed that he had not quitted it for ever? Suddenly he reappears! And demands his rights or those of his son! He promises to the French people Liberty, Victory, Peace; he reclaims the throne.

"Author of the most tyrannical constitution that ever governed France, he speaks to-day of Liberty, and it was he himself who, during fourteen years, undermined Liberty. He had not the excuse of traditions nor of the usage of autocracy; he was not born to the purple; it was his fellow-citizens whom he made his slaves and whom he chained. . . . He promises victory, and three times he has left his armies, like a coward, in Egypt, in Spain, in Russia. . . . He promises peace, and his very name is the signal for war."

The Court was blind to the danger, and the upper classes were indifferent; the Government in despair turned to its old enemies the

Liberals, who now were most active in its defence. Benjamin 1815
suddenly found himself the centre of attention from all parties. While Lainé was begging his good offices in behalf of the Government, Fouché and Sebastiani were making overtures to him on the part of the Bonapartists. "What feebleness! What pitifulness!" he cried. "They are trying a million ways to organize resistance and everything is slipping out of their hands." On the 17th came the news that the Marshals, Soult and Ney, had gone over to their old leader, taking their men with them. Then they all lost their heads. The streets and cafés were full of shouting mobs. Everybody had something to propose, but nothing was done. "They put everything off till to-morrow, and *He* is at Auxerre," wrote Benjamin in his Journal. Each evening a group of earnest, sensible men, Constant among them, gathered at M. de Lainé's to consider what steps they could take to save France from a return to Bonaparte's rule; but as they had no official character they could accomplish nothing. "They were not statesmen but theorizers," says Pasquier contemptuously. Neither the suggestion of Louis' favourite, M. de Blacas, that the monarch, accompanied by the peers and deputies, ride forth to meet and strike terror to the soul of the victor of Marengo; nor Marmont's scheme to fortify the Tuilleries and send the royal princes to raise the provinces to resistance—nor yet Chateaubriand's proposition that they should all gather about the King and there await the advent of the usurper in order that from their blood a new Monarchy might be born—impressed Benjamin as especially practical.[1] He saw the only hope for the nation in the stability of the representative bodies. On the 19th of March the *Journal des Débats* printed his famous challenge to Napoleon, boldly signed, and containing the oft-quoted words, "I will not go, a miserable renegade, dragging myself from one power to another, covering infamy by sophisms and stammering profane words to redeem a shameful life!" "Never since Tacitus or Juvenal," says de Broglie, "had tyranny been so delivered over to public execration as in this article." He went further; in the face of the greater danger which menaced the country he glossed over the offences done to Liberty in the name of the restored Bourbons:

"Louis XVIII., with noble trust . . . has taken the moment of peril to render the Constitution of France still more liberal. . . .

[1] "Benjamin Constant burst out laughing at the consolation offered." (Lafayette's *Mémoires*.)

1815 The man who threatens us had usurped all rights; he deprived agriculture of its arms; he made grass grow in our commercial cities; he led off to the ends of the earth the flower of the nation, only to abandon them in the end to the horrors of famine and to the rigors of icy winter. . . . He returns to-day, poor and greedy, to snatch from us what still remains. . . . His appearance, which is for us the renewal of all our misery, is for Europe the signal for war; the people are alarmed; the Powers are aghast. No nation can trust his word; none, if he is to be our ruler, can live at peace with us. On the side of the King is Constitutional Liberty, safety, peace; on the side of Bonaparte is slavery, anarchy and war. . . . I say to-day, without fear of being misunderstood, 'I have wanted Liberty under diverse forms; I saw that it was possible under the Monarchy; I saw the King rally to the ideals of the nation. . . .'"

It was a brilliant article, one of his best, but although he says in the *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours* that he believed at the time he wrote it that a Liberal Constitution was about to be granted by Louis, and the Constitutionalists recalled to the Government, he realized the imprudence of publishing such an anathema in the teeth of the returning idol. "It is time to recall that life is a burden," he confided to the Journal. The crisis came even quicker than he expected. That very night Louis descended to the courtyard of the Tuilleries escorted by Blacas, bade farewell to his courtiers and servants, and drove swiftly and quietly away to Lille, followed by the rest of the royal family and the household troops. "My article has appeared too late!" cried Benjamin. "The collapse is complete and they do not even think of fighting." Two days later Bonaparte entered Paris.

On the news of the departure of the King there was a wild scattering. Everybody was urging everybody else to fly; nobody knew where to go. Mme. de Staël, who had just secured from the Bourbons a promise of the repayment of Necker's millions, packed her boxes and fled to Switzerland, entreating Benjamin to follow. He thought of trying to reach Berlin and join his wife, and wrote Mme. Récamier, urging her to go too. Then he had an idea of fleeing to England. But his horses were taken from him, and he took refuge with the American minister, Crawford; then finally started for Nantes to join Barante. On reaching there he found that Nantes had declared for Bonaparte, and that Barante had fled. So he returned to Paris to meet his fate. The tricolour was flying from the Tuilleries; soldiers roamed the streets singing the Marseillaise; the "Little Corporal," at the head of a

handful of his followers, was reinstalled in the palace, where the 1815
lilies of the Bourbons had been hastily stripped from the Napoleonic Bees, over which they had been sewed.

Notwithstanding the assurances of Fouché and Sebastiani, and other old friends of the Directoire days, that he had nothing to fear, Benjamin found his situation in Paris far from comfortable. He heard his challenge to Bonaparte repeated on every side, and even saw his article reprinted and copied in foreign papers. He confessed to himself that he had done a foolish thing in writing it. In the course of his efforts to get a passport for Germany he called on Joseph Bonaparte, who tried to persuade him that France still had need of him in the crisis through which she was passing, that the Emperor was greatly changed by his reverses, and no longer desired anything but Liberty and Constitutionalism for the country, and that Constant would render a great service to the Liberalism which he advocated if he wrote a Memorial on the Peace for the *Journal de Paris*. So he wavered for several days between suspicion of Bonaparte's sincerity, and willingness to catch at any hope; between the impulse to flee, and an inclination to stay and count for something in the reorganization, if there was really to be one. "Ought one," he asks in the *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*, "to bury in some obscure retreat a life that might be useful to the country?" While he hesitated, Napoleon, at the suggestion of Fouché, formally invited him to present himself at the Tuileries on April 14. The Emperor perceived that Constant's pen and brains would be useful to him at this juncture; still more did he see the moral effect that the adherence of this uncompromising Liberal, so lately his bitter foe, would have in persuading the world that his professed conversion to Constitutionalism was genuine. Benjamin has left a description of their interview:

"I wanted to know for myself what we could hope for, and what change experience had wrought in him. . . . He did not try to deceive me either as to his views or as to the state of affairs. He did not represent himself as chastened by the lessons of adversity. He did not want to claim the merit of having returned to Liberty by inclination. He coldly examined in his own interest, with an impartiality verging on indifference, what was possible and what was preferable." [1]

He took pains to convince Constant that he owed his return to

[1] From the *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*.

1815 the will of the people, and gave him several sheets of his own composition on the subject, which he asked him to use in an answer to Lord Castlereagh, who had attributed his success to his influence with the army. This Constant declined to do, as until he was sure that he was not bringing a despot to France, he was unwilling to write anything which would further compromise himself. Napoleon assured him that he would never use the people's devotion to make himself "king of a Jacquerie." When his aim was to rule the world, he said, he required unlimited power; but now, since the people were tired of war, he aimed only to govern France. He thought it possible that a constitution might be a good thing, and he wished to have public discussions, open elections, responsible ministers, a free press—all Constant's pet institutions, in fact. "I am the man of the people," he said.

"If the people really desire Liberty, I owe it to them. . . . I am no longer a conqueror, I cannot be. I know what is possible and what is not. I have only one mission now—to save France and to give her a suitable Government. . . . I do not hate Liberty. I swept it away when it obstructed my path, but I understand it. I was bred in the idea of it. . . . The work of fifteen years is destroyed; it cannot be begun again. That would take twenty years and the sacrifice of two million men. Moreover, I desire peace, and I can obtain it only by force of victories. I do not wish to give you false hopes. . . . I allow it to be said that negotiations are going on. There are none. I foresee a difficult struggle, a long war. To sustain it the nation must sustain me, but in return it demands Liberty. It shall have it."[1]

This frank, man-to-man kind of talk did not miss its mark. It is not necessary to point to Constant's mobility, his susceptibility to flattery, the appeal to his imagination of the hcaracter, the boldness, the cunning of the hero whose dramatic reappearance had stunned Europe, in order to explain his falling into the trap. To-day, with all the documents before them, historians differ as to the sincerity of Bonaparte at this time, and as to whether he might not have kept his promises had Europe allowed him to show what he would do. Of course, Constant came from this interview hypnotized, astonished, convinced.[2] He had been in

[1] From the *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*.

[2] Frightful prodigy, bloody meteor! Even in detesting thee, men would admire thee more," wrote Constant afterwards in an unpublished poem. Without counting the celebrated case of Marshal Ney, he had excellent company in his apostasy.

the presence of a great genius, one of the most remarkable men in 1815
history; he had talked with him intimately, had been taken into his confidence. He had absorbed some of Bonaparte's immense confidence in Napoleon, as really the only man big enough to save France then, if she was to be allowed to be saved.

Even before Bonaparte sent for him, Constant had decided to remain in France and accept his leadership. Two weeks before this interview he had written to Charlotte:

"A few days ago I wrote you to tell you how peaceful my situation was, and to reassure you completely about myself and the future of France. I cannot be suspected of partiality for the Emperor, in rendering to him homage which cannot be denied him. I fled from his rule because I found he did not give sufficient liberty to France. I tried to maintain, as far as the effort of a mere citizen could contribute to it, the Bourbons on the throne. I thought that their weakness offered a better chance to liberty. I decided to depart after their fall, when a complete change in the system of imperial government made me conceive unexpected hope. The magic of the Emperor's return, the universal assent of the army, the not less general adherence of the nation, the liberal principles which he proclaimed, the manner in which his strongest opponents have remained under his eyes without incurring proscription—all this has produced in men's minds a decisive reaction in his favour. One must then be surely persuaded that to-day France is indissolubly connected with him; to attack him would be to attack France; the foreigner knows what that costs.

"So prepare yourself to come by Switzerland, if you cannot come by Frankfort; for whether there is war or whether there is peace, I shall not quit France again." (April 1815.)

At the news that Benjamin Constant had gone over to Napoleon there was an outburst of abuse from all sides, and floods of anonymous letters, accusing him of having sold himself. The Liberals refused to pardon his acceptance of the Bourbons; the Imperialists reproached him for his former sarcasms against Napoleon; the Royalists hated him for the promptness of his recantation. Sismondi was almost the only one of his old friends who stood by him, and Sismondi had himself been won over by Napoleon, and, having also been received by him, was persuaded that he had "the religion of Liberty." From Mme. de Staël he received a scorching letter. "I will not say anything to you about politics," she wrote; "I do not care to *stammer profane words*; if it is true that you are working on the Constitution, I advise you to think

1815 more of guarantees than of declarations of rights." [1] His relatives in Switzerland preserved an uncomfortable silence; even the loyal Rosalie could, at best, only suspend judgment. To Charles's criticisms she responded:

"Be so kind as to talk no more of Benjamin, at least until you have something certain to tell. It is my custom not to abandon my friends in their misfortunes nor their mistakes. The lady of Coppet has already done him enough harm without spreading bad news of him, especially as she will make use of him to pull her chestnuts out of the fire. I forbid every one who comes, to talk to me about it." (To Charles, May 5. Geneva Archives.)

In parrying the charge of having written a defence of the Bourbon throne on the 19th of March and passed into the service of the usurper before the ink was dry, Benjamin's ready wit came to his rescue. "It was," he replied, "because on the 20th I lifted up my eyes and saw that the throne had disappeared, and that France still remained." But he never lived down that unfortunate article in the *Journal des Débats*. He could explain it, logically and honestly; but phrases outlive arguments, and those stinging words about the miserable renegade dragging himself from one ruler to another had a trick of sticking in people's memories. They furnished a too convenient weapon for that class of thinkers who cannot see farther than a party or a leader. The following *Chansonette*, printed by M. de Sévery, is a sample of the way his apostasy was utilized by his political opponents. It is set to the popular air, *V'la ce qu'c'est que d'aller aux bois*:

On demande un gouvernment,
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant!
Qu'il soit tour à tour monarchique,
Aristocratique
Ou democratique,
N'importe, j'en serai content,
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant!

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[1] Nevertheless Rovigo (cited by Sainte-Beuve) said she wrote Joseph Bonaparte that the return of the Emperor was "prodigious and surpasses all imagination," at the same time recommending her son to him. And of the *Acte Additionnel* she said that it contained "all that France needs, nothing but what it needs, nothing more than it needs." But this may have been partiality for Benjamin's work. Her future son-in-law, the Duc de Broglie, unhesitatingly took the oath of allegiance, believing a Constitutional Government might be organized "strong enough to master the Master."

1815

Je fus Républicain ardent,
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant !
Mais sous son pouvoir despotique
L'oppresseur unique
De la République
Reçut mes voeux et mes serments,
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant !

Le dix-neuf mars publiquant,
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant !
Sur Bonaparte avec outrance,
Je criai vengeance,
Mais bientôt la France
M' vit le Benjamin du tyran,
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant !

Je trouvai le poste amusante—
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant !
Mais lorsqu'eu ce monde où tout s'eu passe
Une auguste race a repris sa place,
Je me suis fait indépendant,
V'la c'qu'c'est qu' d'être constant !

Those who took him seriously hurled the word *cabotinage* at him; but had he succeeded, like Cavour, in guiding his country to unity and stability, he would have been called an opportunist. Others, deceived by his habit of bantering indifference, believed him devoid of fixed opinions or principles, moved only by ambition, a gambler, staking his fortune on a lucky throw. It is true that he was ambitious, but his ambition never got the better of his Liberalism; and he was a gambler, but not a reckless one. He never put his coin down until he had coolly surveyed all the chances, and weighed them. But he often had a gambler's bad luck.

He seems to have suddenly become the pawn for which both sides were playing. At the very moment when he was wavering between returning to Germany or accepting Bonaparte's overtures, Talleyrand was writing to Mme. de Staël from the Congress at Vienna :

" I would be glad if Benjamin Constant could and would come here. Get this wish of mine to him, and tell him that I am not the only one here to express it. I am, rather, holding the pen in this matter for the people who signed the Declaration of 13th March." (April 6.)

Mme. de Staël circulated the story of what an opportunity Benjamin had missed in Lausanne, and Rosalie heard that the Congress had decided to summon him to them as the first publicist

1815 of Europe, in order to make use of his pen and his knowledge. "What luck, and what a man lost!" she exclaimed. It may have been in answer to this belated invitation that he uttered the *bon mot* which Rosalie heard ascribed to him in Switzerland: "Go hang yourself, Talleyrand! We have been playing traitor and you weren't in it." It was quite like him to have said it; his dignity was often sacrificed to his wit, and his habitual trifling in order to hide his real emotions was a weakness he never took the trouble to cure.

But he was sincere in believing that Bonaparte was about to restore the liberties of France. Michel Berr, a young Jewish writer from Lorraine, who had met Benjamin at Riouffe's, relates a conversation he overheard in the salon of Lanjuinais, after the reconciliation with Bonaparte. Benjamin was protesting the sincerity of the Emperor. "Are you sure that you are not mistaken?" asked Lanjuinais. "I swear before God," was the answer. "Bonaparte confused the game of representative government—neutrality of the higher powers—with the responsibility of his agents. It was all almost unknown to him. . . . He has learned better in his exile. When he is convinced that they want neither his autocracy, nor his family, he will give up when necessary, to the ministers, and go with the majority." Constant went on to praise all he saw in the Council of State, and the liberalism of Bonaparte's brothers. He ended by convincing Lanjuinais, and they parted affectionately. The following letter to de Gérando, written after Waterloo, shows that he sincerely believed that he had chosen the best way, at the time, to help France:

"No, I have neither regret nor repentance for what I have done. On the contrary, I think I followed the course I should have followed, and even now when I am most painfully moved, I still prefer my lot to that I would have had outside, carrying on civil war against my country, and the massacre of my fellow-citizens, for the sake of the re-establishment of one family. . . . It is a peculiarity of my life to have always passed for a most unfeeling man and the coldest, and to have been constantly ruled and tormented by sentiment, independent of all calculation, and even destructive to my interests of position, of fame and of fortune."

On the 22nd of April he had been appointed to Bonaparte's Council of State. "The leap is made. I am wholly his," he wrote. He had hoped to receive the nomination for Deputy also, but public opinion was against him, and an article he wrote for the *Journal des Débats* just before the elections did not help him, for it gave his

enemies an opportunity to contrast his present position with the 1815
fatal letter of March 19, which they now caused to be reprinted and distributed broadcast. In his chagrin he made the mistake of writing a letter to the Emperor, attempting to explain it—a stupid thing to do, as he afterwards acknowledged. Lafayette was elected to the coveted place, and he had to content himself with the sessions of the Council, where they were discussing the new Constitution, and with the novel sense of being fairly and definitely attached to " a party."

Mme. de Staël's friends viewed with some amusement the apparition of Benjamin in all the glory of a Councillor ; " on the road to become the nymph Egeria of the Emperor, and the Solon of France," one of them said. Mme. de Gérando wrote to Camille Jordan :

" I see Benjamin frequently and it is the funniest, the oddest and the most exasperating thing in the world to listen to him. He thinks the Emperor a greater phenomenon than he can express, or than he anticipated. He is in a state of bewilderment at the prodigious variety and facility of his powers. He is eager to collect all the sayings which depict or reveal this wonder."

Victor de Broglie, calling upon him in his spacious apartment in the rue St. Honoré, smiled, very much as Mme. de Charrière might have done, to behold " this sad and singular character " in his new rôle of courtier, his fine carriage waiting before the door, and his gorgeous Councillor's coat thrown over a chair in the ante-chamber. Benjamin loved to play his part well ; there was enough of the artist in him for that, even if he *was* " the worst king " on the stage at Coppet. After he became Deputy, he was noted for the punctiliousness with which he always wore his official coat, and even after the first Restoration he had written to Rosalie for the family seal : " Now that every one is resuming, right and left, the old titles and the new ones, my seal ' B.C.' gives me the air of a dry-goods merchant, and as, unfortunately, I have nothing to sell, I would like to have all the advantages of a man living nobly—that is, of use neither to himself nor to others."

How could he expect others to take him seriously when he refused to take himself so, and was the first to turn everything he did into jest ? To his friends, even to those who, like Barante, still loved him, he could never be anything but a great grown-up boy, frank, lively, child-like, trifling—the best fellow in the world, but devoid of faith, of convictions, of definite purpose. It remained for

1815 a younger generation to trust the sincerity of his leadership and to accord the loyalty and homage to which his talents entitled him. A man who was qualified by sympathies and by temperament to understand the psychology of Constant better than any of his contemporaries (Henri Beyle), has praised his courage in adhering to his convictions at the risk of criticism and ridicule for which a salary of 25,000 francs was a small compensation, and has pointed out that most of his former associates who now distrusted his motives had themselves long before abandoned their cause, and gone over to the Empire, where they had been receiving high appointments and large salaries, while Benjamin was keeping his independence in poverty and obscurity.

And however he might jest, he was seriously determined to use his new position for the guarantee of France against any such despotism as she had submitted to under the Empire. The *Acte Additionnel*, which was the name by which the new Constitution Bonaparte gave to the people was known, was so largely his work, at least in popular opinion, that it was known as "Le Benjamin." Yet in its final form it was far from satisfactory to him, and received so much abuse that he published a sort of explanation or apology for it, entitled *Principes de Politique*, which, although it reproduced whole chapters of the earlier *Réflexions sur les Constitutions*, contained much new material, and showed, too, how many concessions he had been forced to make to the will of the Emperor. When, in impatience over the slowness and stupidity of the commission he had appointed to draw up the promised "Liberal Constitution," Bonaparte offered the task to Constant, it was with the assurance that he was ready to give France all those free English institutions that Constant deemed indispensable as a guarantee of individual rights and the welfare of society. But when the first draft of the Constitution was submitted for approval, Bonaparte flew into one of his characteristic passions, and cried that he was being forced into a course which was not his. "I am being weakened; I am being manacled!" he exclaimed. "My plan of a Constitution is not a success," wrote poor Benjamin in his Journal, "for it is not precisely Liberty that they want." So he set to work on a modification, promising himself, however, that he would not really change it in the points he most desired. After several more conferences, he began to think that he was going to carry some, at least, of his points. Had he realized then how little Bonaparte really cared for any constitution, good or bad, he might have spared himself some trouble. "Mon Dieu," said the henchman Fouché, to an accused man who

had wanted to appeal to the Constitution, "the Constitution is like 1815
a pretty woman at whom one may throw a passing glance of admiration, but at whom it is not permitted to look closely."

The new Constitution was in fact little more than a modification of the *Charte*. By treating it as a mere *addition* to the existing laws, the wily dictator prevented it from coming up for public debate, a subterfuge which Constant violently opposed. In spite of his promise to reconsider this determination in deference to his Councillor's views, Bonaparte had "Le Benjamin" printed at once in the *Moniteur* (April 24) under the title *Acte Additionnel*, adding a preamble which was worded as if there had been no interruption to his reign: "Since we were called, fifteen years ago, by the wish of France, to the government of the Empire, we have sought to perfect at various times, according to the needs and wants of the nation," etc. Then, if not before, Constant must have realized how baseless had been his dreams of a "changed Napoleon." And the clever Emperor had contrived to lay upon his councillors the responsibility for the *Acte Additionnel* in such a way that he himself appeared to be helpless in their hands. Thomas Whishaw, who was in Paris at this time, wrote to England of the "state of coercion to which Napoleon is supposed to be reduced," and added, "The Constitution is universally abused as being too monarchical, and Constant, one of its authors, is almost afraid to show himself in society." In the Preface to the *Principes de Politiques* Benjamin attempted to excuse the absence of so many of the expected reforms, by urging its possibilities for expansion; and while deploring the retention of Bonaparte's favourite electoral colleges, instead of the promised direct elections, and its silence on important questions of municipal powers and of confiscation, he pointed to its provision for free discussion in the two Chambers, its clear statement of the principles of responsibility of ministers[1] and of Government agents, and its establishment of the trial of press offences by a jury. Although the only check on the Government's initiative in declaring peace and war was the right of the representative bodies to withhold taxes and levies—clearly the work of the despot—there was enough that was good in the new

[1] Léon Radiguet, in an important study of the *Acte Additionnel*, says that the French "weakly imitated" the English Constitution without comprehending its spirit. Ministerial responsibility, he says, in the *Acte Additionnel*, is treated on its penal side only, and its political significance is not understood. But, he adds, this was also true of the English Constitution at that time.

1815 *Acte* to show that it had not been obtained without a struggle, and all that was good was plainly Benjamin's. One of its most unpopular provisions was his, that of the Hereditary Peerage, borrowed from the English Constitution, which he greatly admired. Much as Bonaparte secretly liked this idea, he strongly doubted the effect on public opinion of such an aristocratic organization, for, it has been said of him, "without having the sentiment of liberty, he had the instinct of what was popular." The criticism it evoked justified him. The Hereditary Peerage clause was contrary to the Decree which had abolished nobility and feudal titles; and those who had seen in Benjamin's co-operation in the *Acte Additionnel* a guarantee of its respect for the principles of the Revolution, now accused him of having deserted his cause.[1] He was assailed by thousands of pamphlets and attacked on every side.

But while the politicians railed, the general public showed itself apathetic to constitutions, good or bad. Yielding against his own judgment to Benjamin's advice, Bonaparte made a show of popular government by presenting the *Acte* to a plebiscite of the people, but the small number of voters who availed themselves of the right testified that the nation at large was as indifferent to it as the Emperor himself.[2]

The result of the plebiscite was announced to the nation, and the Constitution was proclaimed, on June 1, at a great assembly in the Champs de Mars. This national event, the first in which Benjamin had an official part, failed to rouse the enthusiasm of the people, and was a tedious affair, notwithstanding the Emperor's attempt to make it a brilliant spectacle. No less dampening to the ardour of the new Councillor must have been the consequences of his advice to Bonaparte to hasten the elections for deputies, in order to convince the nation of the sincerity of his Liberalism and of his intention to adhere to the new laws he had granted. The Emperor, who followed this advice very reluctantly, must have felt that he had one grievance the more against "men of ideas," when an overwhelming Liberal victory at the May elections left him embarrassed by a representative body almost wholly opposed to him, at the very moment when he needed the backing

[1] He subsequently modified his views of the Hereditary Peerage. At this time he favoured it as another barrier to limit the power of the ruler.

[2] Radiguet thinks the *Acte* "cooled the enthusiasm of the nation, increased suspicion, lowered the courage of the bravest, and deprived Napoleon of a large part of his power and prestige."

of the nation for the inevitable war against united Europe. The 1815
fact that he was no longer an autocrat, but a Constitutional monarch, was in a great measure responsible for the manner in which he conducted the campaign, since he was hampered by the necessity of considering the effect on popular sentiment of a brilliant attack. Thus, indirectly, Benjamin has the responsibility of having opened the road to Waterloo.

At midnight on the 11th of June, Bonaparte slipped away to join the army he had been concentrating on the Belgian frontier. "The Emperor has gone and has carried with him his whole fate. No one is at heart sure of success," is the entry in the *Journal Intime*. His last instructions to the Chambers had been not to spend themselves on the discussion of abstract questions while the enemy was at their gates, but they went right on quarrelling about rights and the details of the Constitution. A week later the *Moniteur* announced a French victory in Belgium and that Wellington was a prisoner. "If it is true, it is not the whole truth; if it is not true, it is worse than the whole truth, in the opposite sense," wrote Benjamin. The next day the rumour was still unconfirmed. Every one felt that the end was approaching, and that all power of resistance was gone. The Chamber was unmoved. "It will not save its friends either by assent or by independence; it will be the same indecision as on the 20th of March." To Mme. Récamier he wrote that he was hard at work trying to rally the defeated party, and trying to persuade people who wanted to live to go and get themselves killed, and people who were afraid, to have courage. "There is a wonderful disposition to let themselves be hung. This is the point of resemblance between all the parties." He added a postscript in haste: "The news is confirmed. There are only a few hours more in which to save France. . . . We are summoned to the Council at ten."

But it was not the Council that could save France now. Early on the 21st of June Bonaparte returned to the Elysée, and that evening Benjamin was summoned to confer with him. Although Lavalette and Marshal Davout, who had just waited upon him, thought him greatly excited and exhausted, Benjamin was impressed by the calmness of his bearing and clearness of his mind, even in this extremity. Yet he was fully aware of the gravity of the situation, and had made a last appeal to the loyalty of the Chambers through his brother, who had been dispatched to the hall where they were in permanent session, surrounded by the

1815 National Guard. Knowing Constant to be opposed to his abdication, it was of that he wished to speak to him. As they paced to and fro in the garden of the Elysée in the dusk of the summer evening, they could hear the mob outside in the Avenue de Marigny howling for the army to come to the defence of their hero, and trying to scale the wall in order to offer him their aid. Divining Constant's uneasiness lest, as a last resort, he should use this dangerous weapon of the people against his enemies, he said to him, " If I chose, the Chambers would cease to exist. But have no fear ; I did not come back from Elba in order to drown Paris in blood ! " " It is not Liberty that is deposing me," he continued. " It is Waterloo, it is fear—a fear by which your enemies [meaning the Allies] will profit." He did not cease to protest that it was not only his right but his duty to dissolve the Chambers. Constant, whose views on abdication had been changed by the attitude of the Deputies, urged upon him the futility of such a measure. " Even supposing," he said, " that by a bold stroke you recovered the power, you could not keep it three days." He assured him that the Chambers were not in a mood to grant him so much as a soldier or a horse or a crown piece to get away with, and advised him to flee while there was yet time. But the thought of flight was hateful, and the Emperor insisted, in spite of this advice, on retiring to Malmaison to await his conquerors. " I have heard," Rosalie wrote Charles, " that it was Benjamin who in a long interview persuaded the Emperor to renounce his plan of Empire to which he would still have very willingly sacrificed many millions of men. If Benjamin has accomplished some good, that will console him for having been mistaken in other matters." But whatever rumours flattered the pride of Rosalie over her cousin's part in this drama, Benjamin understood that it was mainly weariness of the contest, together with unwillingness to plunge France into a civil war, that induced the Emperor to sign the Act of Abdication for a second time.

The artful Fouché, who had long been playing a double game between Metternich and the ministers of the Coalition, now hastened to have himself appointed president of the provisional government, and dispatched a commission to the Allied Sovereigns to treat for peace, on the basis of the integrity of France and the acknowledgment of Napoleon's son as King, although he had not the slightest expectation of the success of this commission. Because he had no such expectation, he appointed to serve upon it the men whose presence in Paris at that time would most embarrass his

own scheme to place the Duke of Orléans on the throne. These 1815
men were Laforest, a diplomat and friend of Talleyrand, who was head of the commission; Lafayette; Pontécoulant, a former senator and member of the Chamber; Sebastiani; D'Argenson; and Constant, who was acquainted with almost all the foreign diplomats, as secretary. As soon as they had departed, Fouché secretly sent out a second commission, and to Wellington. This, being composed of avowed Royalists, was of course more honourably received than the first, whose principles were known to be hateful to the ministers of the Coalition.

Having paid a parting visit to the Emperor, who continued to astonish him by the philosophy with which he accepted his reverses, and the liberal spirit with which he discussed the situation of France, Benjamin started on his mission on the 24th of June. The commission encountered obstacles and misfortunes from the first, as Fouché intended they should. Had they proceeded by Metz they would have gained a day on the rival envoys, but he had taken care that they should go by Laon, where the rearguard of the French army lay. From Laon, Constant sent a flag of truce to Blücher, asking for an armistice before seeking the Sovereigns. The messenger who bore Blücher's reply was Joseph of Westphalia, and the message was far from reassuring; no passports were offered to the envoys. Annoyed at the insolence of the foreigners, Benjamin attempted to cross on horseback to the advanced posts of the Coalition, but was turned back. Even when, with great difficulty, he succeeded in getting Blücher to appoint a commission of three to confer with him, the terms of the armistice which they brought were, he said, absurd; full of empty phrases about the independence they proposed to allow, while protesting against any proposition to permit the French to govern themselves.[1] Meanwhile the armies continued to advance upon Paris, and the commission, foiled and tricked on all sides, without passports, still struggled to approach them. Even Alexander, he who had

[1] Michel Berr saw Constant immediately after his return from Haguenau, and was told by him that it was imperative that the Chamber sustain some candidate of its own for the throne, Napoleon II. or the Duc d'Orleans, but that Paris must keep matters in its own hands until the arrival of the Emperors. "When they arrive, if the Bourbons have not entered by force, they (the Emperors) will not be the ones to restore them, and everything will be possible; but if they find the Bourbons on the throne, they will not overthrow them, and our future will be frightful." Houssaye thinks the envoys took as a declaration of Blücher's intentions what were "merely the vague promises of his aide-de-camps."

1815 once talked of a Russian Order for Benjamin, made excuses for not receiving them. The envoys began to see that the obstacles were not mere chance.

The situation was not improved when at last passports were furnished and a commission appointed to meet them at Haguenau, consisting of General Walmoden for Austria, Lord Stewart for England, General Knesebeck for Prussia, and Count Capo d'Istria for Russia. The representatives of the Allies were very ungracious to the Frenchmen, and Lord Stewart was especially arrogant, not only toward the envoys, but towards his colleagues, " interrupting, contradicting, and drowning everybody else with his loud talking." To Sebastiani's explanation of the Provisional Government now in charge, and request for a passport for Napoleon to go to the United States, the only answer vouchsafed was that no negotiations could be carried on so far from Paris. The disappointed envoys were forced to abandon their efforts to forestall another occupation of the city by foreign conquerors, and to return under escort from the enemy's line. Vexed and thwarted at every step of the journey back, they did not reach Paris until the 5th of July, only to find the capitulation already signed, the Allies once more in possession of the city, the provisional government dissolved, in spite of the protestations of the Chambers, workmen busy in removing memorials of Napoleon's victories from the Invalides, and Wellington now acting in the same capacity of deliverer that Alexander had occupied a year before.

His part in this commission was one of the many charges brought against Constant later by his political enemies. He was accused of having negotiated with the Powers to place a foreign prince upon the throne, and of having revealed the mistakes of the French Government to strangers. Against these charges he defended himself with energy in a note to the *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*, denying the first entirely, so far as any proposition on the part of the envoys was concerned, and defending the second as necessitated by the presence of the Allies upon their border. He describes the enthusiasm which the little party of six defenceless men, going forth to meet the united forces of Europe, inspired in the inhabitants of the occupied districts through which they passed—an enthusiasm which could not but impress the foreigners. Probably, even when he wrote this, he was not aware of the full extent of Fouché's duplicity. In fact he believed him to be his friend, and as long as Fouché remained minister thought he had nothing to fear for himself from the Bourbon reprisals for the Hundred Days. But when, close on the heels of

the general amnesty proclaimed by Louis, a note from Fouché 1815
warned him that he was about to be attacked, and enclosed his passport, he felt less confident. The Royalists, it seemed, were clamouring for the exile of those who had taken part in the government of the Hundred Days, and on the list of three hundred whom the Minister of Police was commanded to intern in the provinces under police surveillance, appeared that of the author of the *Acte Additionnel*. "They talk only of punishing now, and punishing severely," Benjamin wrote Mme. Récamier; "they are particularly enraged against the commissioners, of whom I am one. Pozzo says that we have been shamefully treated, that this last move was too lucky for the Government, because without it, it would have been necessary to conciliate us; but that we put ourselves at the head of the rebellion, that we have been guilty of high treason."[1] The *Quotidienne* came out with a demand for his punishment in the Place de Grève, with Labédoyère, the young Colonel who was afterwards shot for his desertion to Napoleon on his return from Elba.[2]

"Poor Benjamin!" wrote Rosalie. "I think he is the most unfortunate man alive. His mind is so just that it shows him the consequences of the errors into which his weakness and infatuation have led him. Every year I hope that what is great and good in his soul will get the ascendancy and every year he causes me fresh grief."

But far from being crushed or anxious to crawl off in a corner and bury his talents for ever, as his friends had expected he would do, he coolly prepared a Memorial in his own justification, protesting his freedom from any obligations or promises to the Bourbons before the Hundred Days, and arguing that if services to Napoleon were to be made a reason for punishing public men, a new reign of Terror would have to be inaugurated. Décazes had just succeeded Fouché as Prefect of Police, and, wishing to ingratiate himself with a man whose talents might some day be of use to him, he agreed to present this Memorial to the King. As a result, Louis caused both Constant and Sebastiani to be removed from the list of proscribed. Barante offered his congratulations to his old friend on his restoration to favour. "You have persuaded the King!" "I believe so," was the characteristic retort. "I almost persuaded myself!"

[1] Duvergier describes how on April 7, 1829, Benjamin mounted the Tribune in the Chamber in the midst of great commotion, to deny this charge, saying that all the envoys had asked was that the independence of France be respected.

[2] Constant tried to save him, and wrote to Décazes in his behalf.

CHAPTER XVI

MME. RÉCAMIER

(1814–1816)

ANATOLE FRANCE says that Benjamin Constant did not take his ideas from women—he was too intelligent for that—but that as he loved them, he thought for them and in the way they liked. Susceptibility to the charms of the fair sex has not proved incompatible with eminent statesmanship —particularly is this true in French society—but when this susceptibility is permitted to affect a man's public acts, he exposes himself to severe criticism and loses the respect and confidence of the world he serves. Hitherto the feminine influence in Benjamin's life had, on the whole, been beneficent, in so far as it developed him intellectually and stimulated his ambition. But the spell of the " third woman " who affected his life, coming as it did at that period of manhood when most unaccountable infatuations sometimes seize upon the weak points in an impulsive and sensitive temperament, betrayed him into absurdities which public opinion, while unaware of their cause, was never quite able to separate from what was really noble and manly in him.

It is more difficult to be indifferent toward the third passion of his life, because, like some of the foolish episodes of his boyhood, it was wholly of his own creation ; for the reputation of Mme. Récamier as a virtuous and discreet, and perfectly insipid, coquette, was never for a moment endangered by the ardent wooing of this middle-aged lover, who at forty-seven suddenly fell victim to her beauty and her vanity. Just as in the case of his youthful *affaires*, it was less a malady of the heart than of the nervous system. " This woman with whom I have lived in Switzerland, whom I have seen on many occasions and under all conditions, who has never made any impression on me, suddenly takes possession of me and inspires a violent emotion. Am I mad or a fool ? "

The acquaintance with Mme. Récamier must have begun in the

second period of his residence in Paris. Her husband, an elderly 1814
banker with a large fortune, had purchased the residence of the Neckers on rue Mont Blanc, and had transformed it into a veritable fairyland, presided over by his beautiful young wife, who here began her career as a breaker of hearts. Mme. de Staël, who rarely counted women among her friends, was enchanted at once by her loveliness, and thus began an intimacy which was cemented by their subsequent adversities and persecutions at the hands of Napoleon, and which was as rapturous on her side as it was faithful on Juliette's part. In the years that followed the collapse of M. Récamier's fortune, the beauty was a frequent guest at Coppet, and her little room at the château may still be seen, with its dainty chintz hangings, the green silk canopy over the bed, and the gay Japanese wall-paper, bright with birds and flowers, just as it was when she graced it. During the vogue of the drama at Coppet, Constant often played leading rôles with her, and in the course of his fitful residence in Paris he enjoyed her hospitality, and even her confidence, in his tribulations with Mme. de Staël. But while he paid the conventional tribute to her charms, in notes couched in terms of the graceful gallantry of the time, he found her, on the whole, " stupid," " bizarre," " incomprehensible." " Mme. Récamier is here," he wrote Barante from Chaumont, the last time that he was Mme. de Staël's guest, " weary of life, light as a ship with too little ballast . . . repelling flirtations regretfully or resigning herself to them discreetly, and possessing neither the repose of virtue nor the pleasure of transgression." [1]

He had been nearly four months in Paris, after the first return of the Bourbons, when Mme. Récamier sent for him, in order to engage his services in behalf of her friends, the King and Queen of Naples. Notwithstanding his adhesion to the cause of the Coalition in the campaign against his brother-in-law in 1813–14, Murat, the hero of Austerlitz and of Eylaw, saw his newly acquired kingdom of Naples about to be swept away in the new deal that followed the battle of Paris. He was greatly in need of an able publicist who could compose a Memorial to the Powers at the Congress of Vienna, reminding them of their obligations to him and of the importance of preserving the kingdom of Naples intact, with himself on the throne. Mme. de Staël once wrote Juliette that she had " sanctified coquetry until it appeared as proselytism."

[1] On April 15, 1807, he wrote Barante, " Mme. Récamier does not age much. She hasn't a wrinkle, and not one more idea than when you left, but she is always kind and agreeable."

1814 The coquette did not scruple to turn this gift to account on behalf of King Joachim, who, with his consort, Queen Caroline, had sheltered her in their palace in Naples at the time when her intimacy with Mme. de Staël had drawn Napoleon's persecutions upon herself. The result of this kind of proselytism was that the susceptible Benjamin was won, not for the King only, but for herself. The Memorial for which she begged was written forthwith, and had the honour to be cited in the English parliament in a discussion of the affairs of Naples; it is printed in the appendix of Constant's letters to Mme. Récamier. It urges Murat's services in holding back the Italians from a union which would have embarrassed Napoleon's enemies, as being equivalent to the active aid he had agreed to give the Allies, and as therefore entitling him to their recognition as King of Naples, on condition of his joining them against his brother-in-law, who had given him the throne. Moreover, to abandon Murat now, he argued, would be to lose the work of the Revolution in Italy.

In reward for Constant's co-operation, Mme. Récamier, who showed herself less habile as a diplomat than as a coquette, endeavoured to secure for him the title of Official Envoy from Naples to the Congress of Vienna. King Joachim and his Queen recognized the indiscretion of such an appointment, both in its effect upon the ministers of the Allies, and in the jealousy it would excite in the Italians if they saw their affairs officially entrusted to a stranger. "I hope, therefore, that Benjamin Constant will be content with the proposition which will be made to him [of secretary to the Neapolitan delegation], that he will go down there, that he will sustain our interests, and that we shall owe to you the attachment to our cause of a man whose talents will be useful to us," wrote Queen Caroline to Juliette. Certainly it was to her alone they owed this attachment, and to his desire to remain near her that they also owed his refusal to accept the 30,000 francs and the decoration of Commander of the Two Sicilies, which he was offered if he would undertake the unofficial mission. "With your love, I would refuse the throne of the world," he wrote her. The affairs of Murat, riches, life, death, glory, all were nothing, compared to the chance of winning a token of her affection, a half hour's *tête-à-tête*, a smile, a glance. As events shaped themselves, he had not renounced a very glorious future in declining the secret mission to Vienna; the Powers soon broke with Murat, and his end was quite as disappointing as that of Bernadotte, and much more tragic. It would have afforded Benjamin just one more reason

for believing that his adherence to a cause always brought disaster upon it. 1814

He had come away from his interview with Mme. Récamier "madly in love," and in one brief hour the whole fabric of the independent and serious life he had been striving to build up for himself since his separation from Mme. de Staël seemed to have crumbled. He took to gambling furiously, and while he continued his political writing, his inward agitation was so great that it is remarkable that he could work at all. "Peaceful life of Göttingen, where art thou?" he moaned. "Work, politics, literature—all are at an end. The reign of Juliette begins!"

The lapse of years—and of manners—has dimmed the cult of Juliette. The matchless beauty who kindled the flames of statesmen, generals, *littérateurs*, has been cheapened for us in the show-windows of print-shops, along with the Queen Louises and Lady Hamiltons—a languid, white-robed figure eternally stretched on a *chaise-longue*, with a perfect back turned to the company, and a sidelong smile which rejects the admiration it courts. But she was *à la mode* a century ago, and great men of all nations and ranks and creeds languished for the favours she never quite bestowed. The famous friendship with Chateaubriand, so charmingly described in the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, was the climax of a long series of affairs conducted on her part with exceptional propriety and gentle consideration of her victim. "Romeo writes you, Juliette," was the preface of a long letter written her by Lucien Bonaparte, in which he proclaimed himself "sick, unhappy, suffocated by tears." "Friendship is nothing; I need your love—you will kill me; when you have caused me to be taken away from the State, my family, my friends, you may regret it!" he writes. "Mysterious, incomparable creature that you are!" cried Adrien de Montmorency. "This woman, whose beauties and graces resemble those of Venus, appears to have descended from Olympus to fall before you in the attitude of a suppliant," cried Bernadotte, pleading for Bonaparte's clemency for her; and on the eve of Austerlitz he wrote her that he could think only of her. In 1815 Prince Augustus of Prussia, who had fallen in love with her at Coppet, wrote her, while he was besieging a French town, "The joy of seeing you again will be a very potent reason for hastening the siege." The Duke of Wellington was numbered among her victims, and Chateaubriand relates how, when she visited England, the admiration she excited almost broke up a performance at the theatre, the crowds who flocked to see her made passage through Kensington Park impossible, and all England

1814 resounded with the praise of her " celestial face." It would seem miraculous that Benjamin had so long been exposed to the fatal attraction of her beauty without succumbing, were it not that mere physical charm generally made little impression on him. Mme. Récamier, with her innocent, infantile manner, sitting silent and pensive, with downcast eyes, and the Leonardo da Vinci smile, counted for very little when in the brilliant animated presence of Mme. de Staël. But his hour struck, and his seizure was all the more violent, apparently, for having been so long postponed.

The extravagance of the language he used in his love-letters, the adulation, the desperation, were quite similar in tone to what she was accustomed to hear from her other admirers. The words *angel, heaven, goddess*, seemed to rise involuntarily to men's lips in speaking of her ; and so we find Benjamin expatiating on her pure and celestial aspect, as she stood at her door " like a white angel about to mount to heaven and lighting up with her splendour the shadows of the earth." " But the angels have hearts, they love, they are touched at being loved," while Juliette only smiled and gently reproved him. With that curious double personality of his, one emotional, the other intellectual and critical, Constant was entirely able to analyse the secret of her fascination even at its height and to see its shallowness. In the *Récit de Juliette*,[1] a narrative of her early life taken from her own lips, he has laid bare the technique of her little flirtations with an aptness as ruthless as it is subtle. All the flimsy devices of her coquetry, her assumption of intimate confidence where there was none, the vagueness and uncertainty to which she condemned the status of her lovers, her art of confining all tender interviews to public occasions, which heightened the seductiveness, by the insufficiency of the opportunity, all were perfectly plain to him. But he walked into the trap quite as neatly as a stupider man might have done and was satisfied with having detected its mechanism.

On the day following her proposition concerning Murat's Memorial, he sent her a sketch of the document she had requested, accompanied by the following note :

". . . Do you know that I have never in all this life of mine, which you are disturbing, seen anything in the world comparable to you yesterday ? I took you with me to Beugnot's, to M. de Talleyrand's, home, everywhere. I am sad and almost stupefied. Certainly I am not trifling, for I am hesitating on the edge of a steep

[1] Found among her papers and reprinted by Chateaubriand, with omission of all strictures on her coquetry.

slope. It is so indifferent to you whether you cause suffering in 1814
this way. The angels, also, have their cruelties! Then, for the love of King Joachim, return the Memorial to me yourself. It would not be safe to send it!" (September 1, 1814.)

The next day, having received permission to call for the Memorial, he replies:

"To-morrow evening! To-morrow evening? What evening is that? It will begin for me at five in the morning. To-morrow is to-day. Thank God, yesterday is past. I shall be there between ten and eleven. Will they tell me that you are not yet home? I suffer in advance over what I am going to suffer.

"I will wager that you do not believe me. That is because you do not know me. There is a mysterious something in me. As long as it is not touched, my soul is immobile. If it is touched, all is at an end. Perhaps, however, there is yet time. . . . To love is to suffer, but it is also to live, and for a long time I have not lived. Perhaps I have never experienced such life. Once again, till to-night."

It adds to the piquancy of the situation to learn from his Journal that he confided his infatuation to Albertine de Staël, without naming its object, in the hope that the recital of his absurdity would cool his ardour; and that later Mme. de Staël was writing to Juliette, "Tell Benjamin to come this evening. I no longer see him. He does not try to hear what is interesting us. He is mad about you. You ought to give him some interest in others."

In October we find him shadowing her at Angevilliers, where she was visiting the Marquise de Catellan; begging for an interview, fleeing from society, trying to work off his emotion in long solitary horseback rides. He protests that all he asks is the privilege of offering her a pure and disinterested affection, of being ranked as her *premier ami*, without other hope, expectation or sentiment.

"This passion is not an ordinary passion. It has its ardour but not its forms. It places at your disposition a man who is *spirituel*, devoted, brave, disinterested, sensitive, whose qualities up to this time have been useless because they lacked a directing motive. Now, be that ruling motive! Guide me while my powers are intact and time still opens before me, in order that I may accomplish something beautiful and good. You know how my life has been devastated by storms, arising from myself and from others, and in spite of that, in spite of so many days, months, years, wasted, I have acquired some degree of reputation. . . . Take possession of my faculties. Turn my devotion to profit, for your country and

1814 for my glory. . . . Be my guardian angel, my good genius, the God who will set in order the chaos in my head and in my heart. Who knows what the future holds in reserve for France? If I can make noble ideals triumph there, and if I receive from you the strength to do it, and if my endowments, which they call superior, are of service to my country and to an enlightened Liberty, ought you to allow your life to be of no service? This *morale* which you accuse me of lacking—give it to me! The weariness of a perpetual exaggeration—a weariness more painful to see because my behaviour does not correspond with my words, this weariness has made me caustic, ironical, has taken from me, you say, the sense of good and evil. I am like a child in your hands. Give me the virtues which I was made to possess. Use your power. Do not break the instrument that Heaven has entrusted to you." (October 1814.)

The sentiment of these letters is neither novel nor convincing. Their interest derives from the age and position of the man who uttered them. The world found them exceedingly diverting, when thirty-two years after Mme. Récamier's death, they were published by her literary executor. The biographer of Constant finds them painful, but cannot afford to pass them over, if the picture of the man is to be complete. Whoever desires to pursue the subject more minutely may do so in the collection of one hundred and fifty-six letters published by Mme. Lenormant, and there see to what depths of folly his infatuation brought him; how it betrayed him into boastfulness of his talents and honours, in order to win her; into jealousy of every one upon whom she smiled, even to the verge of a duel[1] with her young admirer Forbin, who had formerly held office under the Emperor. In the *Journal Intime*, which supplements the amorous entreaties and reproaches of the letters, we find the explanation of the impulse that dictated the fatal letter of March 19 to Napoleon. The sight of Forbin, he says, strutting about with his great sword, stung him with a desire to distinguish himself in some striking way which would win the admiration of Mme. Récamier. As she was a Royalist in her sympathies, and no lover of the usurper, a crushing denunciation of the return from Elba could not fail to please her and prove his boldness and courage. So he staked his standing on the smiles of a beauty, and lost, and whatever gratitude his hardihood may have won from her was speedily forfeited by his subsequent desertion to the enemy. After

[1] Constant's duels were as numerous as his father's lawsuits. About this time he fought a duel with Montlosier after a dispute over his theory of Feudalism. Just before he left for England there was another affair with Nadaillac.

spending the remainder of his life in endeavouring to reconcile his 1814
conduct with the sentiments of that challenge, his reputation with posterity was destined to receive yet another thrust when the publication of his confessions revealed the motive which had prompted it.

But the story of Juliette affords another view of this many-sided character. The ironical, sceptical, unpoetical mind of Benjamin Constant is the last one we would expect to be impressed by the cult of religious mysticism which had become popular in Europe at that time. We have seen how deep was the hold of the materialism in which he had been nurtured upon his natural intellectual bias, and how he rejected the mystic tendencies of the Weimar philosophers; yet at least twice in the history of his emotional vacillations, he was led to experiment in some of the forms of esotericism that were being exploited in the name of Mme. Guyon and the Mystics of France and Germany.

The crumbling of the faith in old systems of religious thought which had accompanied the political upheaval of society had created a need for something more personal and less conventional. The rage for Cagliostro, with his fiery eyes and "voice like a trumpet wrapped in crêpe," was one phase of this unrest; Mesmerism or somnambulism, as it was called, with its drawing-room features of hypnotism and classes in magnetism, was another. Mysticism, with its effort to transcend the visible, and probe the unknowable, was its more serious aspect, and various sects of Illuminati, all claiming to be descendants of the German sect of that cult, sprung up in France after the Revolution. In 1810 the château of Coppet sheltered so many shades of mysticism and religious heresies, that it became a veritable "Congress of Religions," led by Schlegel, where enthusiasts of every cult and system might exploit their special fad.[1] Toward all this, Constant seems to have preserved an attitude of dispassionate inquiry and tolerance. But a more concrete form of mystical teaching attracted his passing interest.

Within the circle of the Constant family one sect of the Illuminati had gained several disciples. Juste Constant's sister had married a Marquis de Langallerie, and her son, the Chevalier de Langallerie, had embraced the teachings of the *Ames Intérieurs*,

[1] "Catholicism was represented by Mathieu de Montmorency; Quietism, by Langallerie; the Illuminati, by Divonne; Rationalism, by the Baron de Vogt; Orthodox Pietism, by Pastor Moulinié; Benjamin Constant made the synthesis of the whole." (Gautier.)

1808 which were based on Mme. Guyon's doctrine of the union of pure souls with God, as interpreted by Philippe Dutoit, a Lausanne pastor. The elder Langalleries had tried to have the pastor Dutoit expelled from Lausanne, but the heresy flourished on persecution, and their son, the Chevalier, even sheltered the pastor and his disciples for four years at La Chablière, and after Dutoit's death continued to hold meetings in a room on the rue de Grande Chêne, where the relics and the writings of the deceased leader were enshrined.[1] The Chevalier had acquired an influence over his cousin, Lisette, Rosalie's younger sister, and she became a disciple of the *Ames Intérieurs*, greatly to the disquietude of her relatives. She left her home, and lived apart from the world, in a little cottage, *Le Côteau*, on the Langallerie estate. She passed her life in prayer and good deeds, in poverty and in menial labour, entirely happy among her birds and flowers and pensioners, although partially estranged from her family. When, in 1808, Benjamin was passing through the mental agonies of the crisis with Mme. de Staël, Lisette persuaded him to seek the Chevalier, hoping that he would find in the Inner Light the calm and strength he so much needed. The evening he passed with Langallerie and his wife, who was also a teacher, impressed him as " singular," and he saw in the Chevalier merely a short, rotund little person, with a smooth, oily manner, and a nasal voice. But subsequent conversations with him revealed a depth and delicacy of thought, and a genius for leadership, that made up for external defects. Benjamin was more interested in having Mme. de Staël imbibe his doctrines, convinced that they held nothing for himself. He was in no mood then for ecstatic raptures and visions, but when he again saw the Langalleries, in 1811, he admitted that his critical attitude had been an obstacle to his deriving any real benefit from their teachings. " The basis of his system," he wrote Mme. de Nassau, " is a matter which every one must judge for himself, but this system has very beautiful aspects, and at certain times is very beneficial to the soul. . . . I have not followed the road that he pointed out to me, but he has given me a little more calm and less restlessness, for which I am grateful to him."

[1] The veneration of images and relics played an important part in the cult of the *Congregation of Le Jardin*, as it came to be called. " These mystic groups played a very obscure rôle in the religious life of the country. Without any zeal of proselytism, they wrapped themselves in mysticism. Aristocratic souls, they delighted in their refined worship, and avoided contact with a world which they understood slightly and which understood them not at all." (Favre.)

"Do you remember that you used to be a mystic?" Mme. 1808
de Staël wrote him in 1815. Upon her the teachings of the Langalleries seemed to have made a deeper impression than upon Constant. The practical Rosalie could never take seriously his dabbling in mysticism. "You accomplish nothing with me by talking of his Pietism," Rosalie wrote Charles in April 1811, after speaking of how Langallerie's wife had "quitted her rôle of goddess" and been very coquettish with Benjamin. "He is very far from it, and he says quite frankly and very drolly that in a period of agony and irresolution he sought aid from it in all good faith. . . . But as it was necessary to have disinterested sentiments and his were not at all so, he could not get anything from it." Among Rosalie's papers in the Geneva Archives is a letter from Benjamin dated August 30, 1808, on the back of which she has copied the following lines, inscribed "Sismondi; ideas taken from Benjamin":

"A mystic religion is a worship paid to pain; the *dévots* recognize something divine in this profound trouble of the soul by the body; pain for them is the only means of justification which can please their divinity. Moreover, they have made for themselves a God who condemns them to suffering, a God whose sacrifice is renewed every day, at every hour, in all parts of the universe, a God who has created Hell and Eternity, who in this life exalts man by trials, who after death sanctifies him by purgatory. All rests upon an assumption of which suffering is the basis, and one cannot refuse them admiration mingled with pain, not only on account of the beautiful whole, but also for the disinterestedness of the sacrifice of self, which makes the essential character of man." (Geneva Archives.)

With his broad tolerance and his intellectual curiosity, Benjamin was always interested in any new ideas. In May 1808 he wrote Barante that he had "made a fresh attempt to believe something, and had visited a *sorcière*, very famous in Paris.—'Alas, I was more than unprejudiced, and she told me nothing which could furnish me with a pretext for supposing some communication between men and nature; even superstition refuses to give me her support.'" In March 1808 he attended with enthusiasm the course of lectures given in Paris by Dr. Gall, the discoverer of phrenology, "whose system is neither as ridiculous as the religious pretend, nor as dangerously inconsistent as the religious declare. It is perfectly immaterial to the nature of the soul whether it has five senses for instruments, or twenty-seven organs, and if observation leads us to believe that the soul performs such and such an

1814 act, as it sees by the aid of the eyes, and hears by the aid of the ears, I do not see how this change in classification causes any injury to the immortality which they attribute to it." (To Mme. de Nassau, March 7, 1808.)

It was during his infatuation for Mme. Récamier that he again became interested in mysticism, this time through the teachings of Mme. de Krüdner, but for a second time he was unable to yield himself wholly to them. "When one is perfectly honest with oneself, complete conviction is an expression void of sense," he wrote regretfully.

In 1814 Mme. de Krüdner electrified Paris by prophesying the return of Napoleon, "the black angel," from Elba, and the consequent destruction and regeneration of the world. But already, during a former visit, she had created a sensation in Paris society by her exotic costumes and her graceful execution of the "shawl dance." She was the wife of a Russian nobleman who figured in her life "only in profile," to borrow an expression from Sainte-Beuve —and who left her free to wander about Europe. Some of these wanderings had brought her under the influence of a sect of the mystics, and on her second visit she had renounced worldly allurements and adopted the rôle of an apostle of the "royal road of the soul." Sainte-Beuve cynically doubts if she was really much changed, however; "it was still love," he says. In Switzerland she had met the Czar Alexander, the "new Cyrus," and acquired a strong power over his impressible imagination. She came to Paris with him after the Hundred Days, and the curious document known as the Holy Alliance, full of mystical sentiments about brotherhood and peace, was said to have really proceeded from her. Although Alexander was not thought to have improved under her influence and she herself was suspected of being a *poseuse*, society flocked to the "politico-religious conversations" which she conducted at her apartment on the rue St. Honoré. The charm of her strange personality, her pale face, her blonde hair so simply parted above her deep-set, dark eyes, the inevitable traces of suffering which always add to the interest of this type of beauty, her almost monastic garb, her visions, her trances, together with the mysterious effect of the room in which her séances were held, with its mirrors, ornaments and furniture all shrouded in grey linen—awed and thrilled her audience agreeably, as they listened to her descriptions of their depravity, and exhortations to faith and good deeds. She professed to be directed by an inner voice that told her what she

should say—the voice of Jesus Christ—and her favourite theme 1815
was the power that was given to a pure soul to exercise.

Benjamin met her at Mme. Récamier's, and, attracted by the eloquence with which she conversed with the great and prosperous on the inexhaustible topic of human miseries, he availed himself of her urgent invitation to call upon her. In the interview that followed she agreed to establish a "soul-bond" between him and the coy Juliette, and won his gratitude by her "adorable compassion" for the love that tormented him. She also gave him a manuscript for Juliette's perusal. It did not possess any very original ideas, he confessed, but its "touching sincerity" deeply moved him. "Yes, it is here that truth lies," he said; "I perceive it all; all my emotion is calmed. Good and powerful God, finish my healing!" He accompanied the priestess and her children to Clichy, where he heard her assistant, a young curé named Empeytas, read a "meditation" which also affected him profoundly. On his next visit, Mme. de Krüdner gave him a prayer which caused him to burst into tears. In consequence of these meditations and exercises he was able to meet Juliette with more composure than formerly. The next step was to win her to the new teachings, in order that the spiritual union might be effected. But although she was induced to accompany him to a séance, and he was able to write in his Journal, "I have prayed with Juliette!" he soon made up his mind that her life of little coquetries was too trivial to allow of her deriving any lasting benefit from Mme. de Krüdner's ideas—that, on the contrary, she appeared to have been made more coquettish, hypocritical and perfidious than ever. Henceforth his references to Mme. de Krüdner grow less frequent. But she did not forget him or his troubles. After she had left Paris in the wake of the Czar, she continued to pray for him, and begged Mme. Récamier to persevere in her search for divine love, and also to be gentle with poor Benjamin.

And we also must be gentle with him. Arrived at middle life, with the brilliant promise of his youth but half realized, tormented by weaknesses which humiliated him the more because he was so entirely aware of their folly, devoid, moreover, of any foundation of ideals and principles, he felt himself to be like a rudderless ship, as he contemplated his "ruined, devastated life." "How many times I have envied those who have laboured in the sweat of their brows; added one task to another; and lain down at the end of all their days without knowing that man carries in him a mind that he ought to develop! A thousand times I have said, *Be like the*

1815 *others!*" The clap-trap of Mme. de Krüdner's shallow sentimentalism could have appealed to him only in the excited, unbalanced state, largely pathological, through which he was then passing; but in his gropings for something positive, uplifting, he felt, or thought he felt, real goodness and sincerity underlying all her sensational ceremonies and formulas. "Her power lies in a profound conviction," he wrote Mme. Récamier; "and her charm is her immense kindness. In listening to her one forgets all that is odd in her. She possesses something that religion alone gives, and that is of divine nature."

It may be that the quickening of his faith, which finally transformed the whole underlying thought of the *History of Religions*, that he had begun in the spirit of scepticism, was the fruit of these probings of mysticism; but the passion that had stimulated them burned itself out in due time. It serves as a study, Chateaubriand has observed, of the human head, rather than the human heart—"showing what an ironical, romantic, serious and imaginative mind can make of a passion." Were it not for the confirmation of the Journal, the genuineness of the sentiment in these letters to Mme. Récamier might be questioned. Turning over to the final letters in the collection, the occasional requests, coolly and formally worded, for political or personal favours through her influence with Chateaubriand, it is difficult to connect them with the heated protestations and heart-broken reproaches which fill the earlier ones.[1] In his old age he sought her society but rarely; the political tone of her little salon in the attic of Abbaye-aux-Bois accorded ill with his aggressive Liberalism. It is possible, however, that the last vestige of his attachment to Mme. de Staël was removed by this latest folly. "During the two months that I have been in Paris," she wrote Mme. Récamier, "I have not seen the faintest sign of friendship in him, and I never conceived the possibility of his being so insensible. No longer does my life lie there, but fifteen years thus lost are an abyss that nothing can fill. Ah, dear Juliette, what time and emotion we have wasted in life!"

While these disturbances were taking place in his inner life, Benjamin was outwardly devoting himself assiduously to public affairs. We have seen how diligently he strove to give a Liberal Constitution to France, under the Emperor. After the return of the Bourbons and his pardon by Louis, he showed his gratitude by

[1] In the last letter he wrote her (October 1830) he said: "While writing to you my life grows beautiful with tender memories, and I am indebted to you for shedding a less sombre light over my last days."

several articles for the Press. His articles began to be much in 1815
demand in the papers ; the *Indépendant*, the *Journal des Arts*, the *Mercure*, the *Courrier*, all solicited, and all but the last received, his co-operation. After the two former had been suppressed, he concluded that he brought ill-luck to everything in which he took part. His discouragement and depression were increased by the coquetries of Juliette, and by the execution of Labédoyère, for whose pardon he had worked, and whom he had visited in prison. Fouché's retirement, too, shook his determination to remain in France. The July elections had been a sweeping victory for the extreme Royalists, and the Liberal Ministry saw that its days were numbered. It was Mme. Récamier who finally induced him to go to meet his wife, with whom he had once more established communication now that peace had cleared the frontiers of soldiers. The long-suffering Charlotte had written him in an " angelic letter " that she was on her way to join him, so on the 31st of October he set out for Brussels, very sadly. " I am a lyre which the storms break, but which in breaking vibrates in harmonies which you are doomed to hear," was his farewell to Juliette.

Next to America, England had always represented to Benjamin Liberty in its most complete realization, tolerance and personal independence. When he was in his hopeless moods, he consoled himself by dreams of emigrating to one of those two enlightened countries. The favourable reception of *L'Esprit de Conquête* in England, had given him considerable repute in political and literary circles, and his open admiration of the English Constitution was a tribute which had not remained unnoticed. When, therefore, Charlotte succeeded in joining him in Brussels, after many delays and all kinds of obstacles, and declared her preference for London over either Paris or Brussels, as the scene of their reunited life, he determined to renounce any lingering inclination for the vicinity of Mme. Récamier, coupled as it was with all sorts of dangers, both political and sentimental. The full extent of his unpopularity as a late supporter of the usurper, was perhaps more apparent to him now, when he found how it was regarded outside of France. In Brussels, where he discovered that France was detested and his own apostasy was despised, because Bonaparte was regarded as typifying the Revolution, he lived incognito so far as possible, while awaiting his wife, and went only to the houses of Mme. Bérenger and of Lady Charlotte Greville. When Charlotte came he found that her hatred of Bonaparte, intensified by the German monarchical sympathies of the circles in which she had

1816 been living, was not to be placated by the arguments and excuses which he had written her in defence of his own conduct. She thanked heaven that Benjamin had failed in his attempt to reinstate the tyrant, and declared herself willing to share his adversity, but never to enjoy with him a shameful prosperity under the patronage of a despot. When, in January 1816, he arrived in London, he was still doubtful of how English society would regard his part in the Hundred Days. Although they both were hospitably received, and lived in a perpetual whirl of social events—only dining at home nine times in the first thirty-four days, he wrote his friends—he was conscious of a certain coldness on the part of the people they met,[1] which might however be laid to the manners of the Britons, or to the scandal created by rumours of Charlotte's "double divorce." He had never granted to English manners the admiration he bestowed on their institutions. His experience with the English envoy at Haguenau and the arrogance of Wellington's behaviour in Paris after Waterloo, were not easily forgotten. And the prejudice even dated back to his youthful experiences with the English visitors in Paris and Lausanne. To Mme. de Charrière he had once expressed his impressions of this society and its conversational accomplishments:

"Nothing interests me in the English society that I meet. Yesterday I passed ten solid hours there and, damn me, if they talked about anything but *white and black truffles, German and Italian cookery*, and *houses in England where everything was dressed out in the Italian way*.[2] But having beheld follies more foul, more greedy, more purse-proud, and consequently less confident and less *loud*, the bold and arrogant procedure of these *British fools* amuses me considerably. They have not the fault of our Lausannois; you do not hear them talk all the time of thirty *bats* lost at Loto, of a pillow carried off, or opened and the feathers taken out by their tenants. For a fortnight or three weeks it is quite enough, and one *relishes* deliciously the pleasure of being alone."

Although he was very soon convinced that his social life and that of the British could never fit together, that "making calls

[1] Charles heard from friends in London that Benjamin made a mistake in trying to speak English in society, and also that he scandalized people by "talking of the Duchess de Broglie (Albertine) with the tone of paternity, although they find the resemblance between them striking." (To Rosalie, April 1, 1816. Geneva Archives.)

[2] Italicized words are English in the original.

only in the morning when you want to work, and entertaining only 1816
at midnight when you want to sleep," was an awkward and inconvenient arrangement of one's time, that the cost of living in England was appalling, and that the fogs and cold were injuring his own health as well as Charlotte's, he found that the English Parliament entirely satisfied his expectations. The sessions that he attended impressed him as "superb." "My heart beat as I listened to real and solid debates. It is quite different from those pamphlets written by our Deputy marshals and colonels," he wrote, alluding to his favourite insistence on extempore discourses for the Deputies in the Chambers. Yet he soon discovered that politically, as well as socially, the Englishman and Frenchman failed to understand each other. "There is more affinity between the most extreme Frenchman of the party which has proscribed mine, and myself, than between myself and the most liberal Englishman," he concluded.

The French Government did not allow its supposed enemies to escape it by moving across the Channel, and kept its emissaries in London who were on the watch for any possible conspiracies among the Bonapartists. There were not many French in England just then; Constant speaks of meeting Camille Jordan, who had just arrived, "drawing national conclusions from individual idiosyncrasies, but always charming"; Sebastiani, "boring himself and trying to appear profound"; and General Flahaut, "shining among the ladies, and quite at his ease." But these few were enough to excite suspicion, and the police correspondent kept the authorities in Paris well acquainted with all their movements. Benjamin does not figure in this correspondence as one of the Bonapartists, but as possibly open to their seductions, and thus requiring surveillance. His portrait from the point of view of the Bourbon Secret Service in London supplies some interesting details of his English residence.

"He seems to wish to return to France. If this wish is sincere, he ought to communicate, confidentially and to whom it is due, the correspondence he received from Stockholm ten or twelve days ago. If he has not, he should conclude that his presence is not desirable in France. He vacillates in his conduct, he is busy with an important work, and seems to be occupied with some sort of intrigues. My observations on this head are not ripe enough to hazard a conclusion.

"He has been presented at the Danish Embassy; a bad warrant of recommendation. I have already told you that this circle, in which the ambassador has no part, collects all the French of a certain class, who are in opposition to the French Government, to

1816 say the least. The wife was formerly an actress whom the Ambassador married. She has no standing in London.

"M. Constant declared to me that he has no correspondence with Paris, that he never writes or receives any letters from there. . . . He received me very politely, and proposed to return my visit. His principles and way of looking at affairs are just the same, that is to say, opposed to the present system, and to all going on in France to-day. Nevertheless he expresses himself in very decent terms and makes no attack on the King or the Bourbons. It appears that he designs to prolong his stay in London. He has rented a little house on the outskirts, which he has entirely to himself; he has a carriage; I do not know whether it is his own or hired; but he uses it almost every day.

"I tried to find out the motive of his journey to London, but I could not discover it, so far; he is very cunning; he expresses himself with ease and grace, and he knows how to turn a conversation adroitly when it begins to embarrass him. I think that he still intends to publish his book. He sees a printer named Dean, my neighbour, very often, the one who brought out *L'Ambigu* and has printed the best French books. . . ."

The Danish Ambassadress so slightingly referred to, appears often in Constant's Journal entries as Mrs. Bourke; and he also alludes several times to Sir Humphrey Davy (then newly knighted and said by his compatriots to be unduly inflated by the honour), and to Lady Davy, as among his hosts. Other celebrated houses which he frequented were those of Lady Davis Beesborough and her daughter, Lady Caroline Lamb, wife of Lord Melbourne, who was just then in the limelight owing to her recent infatuation for Lord Byron, which had ended in her attempted suicide at Lady Heathcote's ball—"ye dagger scene of indifferent memory," Byron called it. At Holland House, too, he had many friends. The cordiality of his reception in that celebrated circle was perhaps due to the enthusiasm for Napoleon that prevailed there. Lady Holland's worship of the fallen hero, which now took the form of gifts, books, delicacies, constantly dispatched to Saint Helena, would no doubt invest with peculiar interest one who had served him during the Hundred Days, and who had been near him in the hour of his collapse. There was an expectation in this circle that Constant would shortly publish some interesting reminiscences of Napoleon. He had indeed come to England with the intention of establishing his reputation there by writing an account of the Hundred Days, of the causes which had led to Bonaparte's reinstatement, and of his own part in the attempted reconstruction of the Government, but he found that he must await the cooling of party feeling in France

before he could venture to publish his *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*. 1816
John Whishaw, the biographer of Mungo Park and the dictator of Holland House opinions, repeatedly urged him to publish his book, and to make it a history of the Hundred Days, rather than an apology for his own conduct in accepting office under that reign, feeling that his account of the great man would be "candid and rational." He could not forgive him for allowing personal motives to delay its publication.

"I am provoked that he will write nothing about Napoleon, or at least, worth reading. He always appeared to me timid and indecisive, and I never expected much, but after having informed me that his work was in press, and desired me to provide him immediately with a translator, it is really inconceivable that the publication should be entirely withheld. His novel, *Adolphe*, which is just published, has its admirers, but, for a man of literary reputation, appears to me to be an absolute failure."

That Constant had done nothing inconsistent in accepting and making the best of Napoleon's return, was much clearer to these broad-minded English Whigs than to the French people, who were too intimately affected by political changes to see them fairly. Hobhouse (Lord Broughton), who was in Paris just before Waterloo, had excused Constant's attack of March 20 as perfectly reconcilable with his subsequent conduct.

"The attack honestly ventured against him, as he was advancing to Paris, in order to prop a mouldering fabric, has subjected him, unjustly, I think, to the suspicions of the pure Constitutionalists. . . . You will perceive the state of feeling in this country, from the tone and manner with which a person of the reputation of M. Constant thinks it necessary to reconcile his conduct in accepting a place under the imperial government, to his former professions."

Whishaw was never able to understand Constant's desire to conciliate this animosity and prejudice in France, and referred with great irritation to *La Doctrine Politique*, published by Constant after his return to France in 1817, as a "flimsy rhetorical pamphlet" because it was "written in order to make his peace with the French Government." Hence he concluded that its author was an "honest but timid man, who has too great a desire to live in Paris." Constant's career as a Deputy refutes Whishaw's injustice. Vacillating and weak at times he certainly was, but timidity and caution are not his besetting sins, and the Frenchman Stendhal[1] understood

[1] Henri Beyle.

1816 the public situation better when he wrote, after the appearance of the *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*:

> "One can guess at the truth even under the reservations of a clever man. . . . If the style is a little vague it is well to recollect the tone of the English pamphlets published in the reign of James and before the Revolution of 1688. Never has the history of any nation presented so complete a resemblance as that of France in 1822 and that of England in 1684."

It is not surprising, however, that serious-minded people should have been disappointed to find a sentimental romance offered to the British public in place of the valuable study of the Hundred Days which they had expected from Napoleon's late Councillor. *Adolphe* had brought its author a certain éclat in London drawing-rooms, where he had been reading it from the manuscript, as he had already done in certain intimate circles in Paris, and Lady Holland had vouchsafed her criticisms on its final pages. Others among his hearers, chiefly ladies, were greatly moved by the tragic recital. Lady Charlotte Campbell was so affected that when he finished reading, she threw herself at his feet and begged him to change the ending; while Lady Caroline Lamb perceived in the sufferings of the heroine so many resemblances to her own unhappy passion for Byron that she quite disconcerted the rest of his audience by the violence of her emotion. In fact, wherever he read *Adolphe*, his auditors seem to have dissolved in tears, and he himself was so choked with sobs that at times he was unable to proceed. Walpole's friends, the Misses Berry, were made positively ill by the strain upon their feelings and their self-control! It is quite easy for the modern reader to suppress his emotion over *Adolphe*, even while acknowledging the merits of this simple and tragic little tale; but it might have been more difficult when the hero himself was known to be unfolding his own sufferings. In all probability his audience failed to guess the identity of the characters, although Albertine de Staël's "indiscreet resemblance" to Benjamin had not escaped the notice of the gossips during her recent visit to London with her mother. He was urged to print *Adolphe*, but hesitated, he wrote Mme. Récamier, because he feared to give pain to "some one." This reluctance was finally overcome; in the autumn of 1816 it was published in England. *Adolphe* caused a mild sensation in Paris and on the shores of Lake Geneva. In England it was discovered to be immoral. To-day it ranks as one of the French classics.

Although as time passed the Constants became more contented 1816
in their English environment, Benjamin was gradually subsiding into one of the listless, despondent moods to which he was subject, and his letters show that, as in the black days at Brunswick, he was still an adept in the "Anatomy of Melancholy."

"All I ask is an end without suffering, and I let my days slip by with no other desire than an absence of all emotion. The thought of exertion, of business, of any interest whatsoever, makes me shudder. I have no plans and no desires of ever seeing France again. I have no future any more. I detest the past. I have put all my property into the hands of an attorney, leaving him four times more than is necessary to pay my debts, on the sole condition that he will spare me any necessity for concerning myself with it. What I want is the silence of sleep. If this climate had not really impaired my wife's health, I would not have thought of leaving it."[1]

This was the vein in which he was writing, on the eve of the beginning of his career as a leader of the French Liberal party—a career which allowed him no repose, no respite, for the remaining fourteen years of his life. Already the news that was coming from France was more favourable for the Liberals; the Ultra-Royalist excesses were splitting the King's party, and a strong opposition was organizing. Benjamin began to see his own name mentioned in the French papers, and without the abusive epithets with which it had formerly been adorned. In the early days of September the *Moniteur* announced the dissolution of the Chambre Introuvable, of which Louis had been so proud, and this was followed by indications of rapidly increasing strength in favour of the Constitutionalists, pointing to their majority in the new Chamber. The *rente* was rising, confidence was restored, and a general feeling of relief was spreading over the country. At Spa, where he had gone ostensibly in order that Charlotte might take the cure for a serious trouble with her eyes, Benjamin heard that the Government had suppressed Chateaubriand's pamphlet, *La Monarchie suivante la Charte*. "The Ministry," he wrote in his Journal, "is walking on a knife-blade between the nation and the Ultras." The game was up and it was time for him to be off if he was to join in the chase. On the 16th of September he started for Paris, taking with him Charlotte and the still unpublished manuscript of the *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*.

[1] To Mme. Récamier.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DEPUTY FOR THE SARTHE

(1819–1822)

ON the 14th of July 1913, a monument[1] was unveiled in a public square at Le Mans, in the Department of the Sarthe, to the memory of the illustrious Liberal Publicist, Benjamin Constant, who had represented the Department in the Chamber of Deputies for three years and a half. M. Caillaux, deputy from the district of Mamers, who presided at the ceremony, lauded Constant for the earnestness he had put into his political life, which he had interpreted in the noblest sense of the word, "leaving upon the Sarthe the imprint of his limpid, delicate, generous, profoundly human spirit." Addresses followed by Bouglé, Professor of the Sorbonne, and other distinguished speakers. This was not the first time that it had been proposed to honour Constant and commemorate his services to France. Two years after his death, Eusèbe Salverte suggested that a tablet to his memory be placed in the Pantheon, but the opposition of the Doctrinaire party in the Chamber, from whom he had separated in 1817, prevented this recognition of his work for Liberty.

Although his whole public life was devoted to the advancement of individual and national freedom, his official connection with the Liberal party did not begin until 1819, when, at the partial elections in March he was elected by the Department of the Sarthe to be the colleague of Lafayette in the Chamber of Deputies. After his return from England, indeed, from the time of the Hundred Days, Constant may be said to have hitched his political wagon to Lafayette's star, taking him for his pattern and guide. They usually represented the same constituencies, and made their political tours together; Constant was ever ready to come to the General's

[1] Adorned by a bronze replica of Bra's bust of Constant, it stands at the intersection of the rue d'Etoile and the rue des Ursulins. For the account of the dedication and of Constant's election from this department I am greatly indebted to Rudler, *B.C. Député à la Sarthe.*

defence in the Chamber, and it was Lafayette who was selected 1816
to deliver the funeral oration over his bier.

When, in September 1816, the news of the dissolution of the Chambre Introuvable had lured Constant back to Paris, he was at first inclined to be conciliatory and moderate in his attitude toward the Ministry which had resisted the Ultra-Royalists. This was the tone of his first publication after his return, the "flimsy, rhetorical pamphlet" to which Whishaw referred so contemptuously. Although he presented the first copy of *De la Doctrine Politique qui peut réunir tous les Partis en France* to Décazes, the minister who ruled the King, the pamphlet was not wholly in accord with the Government policy—when was Benjamin ever fully in accord with any Government?—but nevertheless was likely to win many independent votes for the Ministry. It was also an answer to Chateaubriand's recently suppressed *Monarchie selon la Charte*, which had attacked Décazes from the side of the clericals and *émigrés*, and it warned all sudden converts to Constitutionalism that they must give proofs of their sincerity before the disinterestedness of their conversion would be credited. If a Mussulman embraced Christianity we should rejoice, but if he wanted to be made Pope we should doubt his genuineness. Moreover, while it was admirable to have the Royalists insisting on their constitutional privileges, these privileges, it must be remembered, were not for them alone.

"A more appropriate title for such books would be, not *The Monarchy According to the Charte*, but *The Charte According to the Aristocracy*, and they should be like the Vedas, written in a sacred language, to be read only by the favoured caste, and remain unknown to the profane. . . . A certain bishop, finding himself on a ship that was about to sink, said his prayers. 'My God!' he cried, 'svae me, save only me; I do not want to overtax Thy mercy!' Let us not invoke Liberty as this bishop invoked Providence." [1]

Witty, ironical, concise, the pamphlet summarized all the sins of the Royalists since the Second Restoration, and they, in turn, denounced it as filled with the "doctrines of the most hideous days of the Revolution." It failed to reinstate Constant at once with the nation, however, notwithstanding his reference to his refusal for thirteen years to serve Bonaparte's Government, "preferring exile to his yoke." This refusal, he urged, ought now to exonerate him from the charge of servility since, when he sat in the Council in the Hundred Days, it was in moments of great peril,

[1] Edition 1872, ii. 289. Laboulaye.

1817 when "twelve hundred thousand foreigners were menacing France." But although the King had pardoned him, his former political comrades refused to, and he had the mortification of seeing men who, like himself, had served Bonaparte in the Hundred Days, chosen for important offices, while he was overlooked. Much as he must have suffered from the slight under his mask of badinage and indifference, it was not, as Barante would have us believe, pique, that drove him to the extreme Left of the Constitutional party which was then forming, but rather a determination to fight for his ideals wherever he found himself most independent and untrammelled. Barante, Camille Jordan, Beugnot, the Duc de Broglie, Guizot, were now in the group within the Ministerial party, which had been nicknamed by the *Nain Jaune* the "Doctrinaires," and whose policy of compromise was represented by certain pet doctrines of their leader, Royer-Collard. While Constant's spirit was conciliatory, it was not for compromise; and it was at this point that he definitely divided from his old political friends of Mme. de Staël's circle.

The party to which he now adhered received its first official recognition in the electoral campaign of 1817. In the lists of candidates then presented, Constant's name appeared beside those of Manuel and Lafayette as "Independants"; those who favoured Monsieur's party, or the Ultras, were called the "Friends of Legitimacy"; and those who supported the Ministry were the "Friends of Legitimacy and of the Charte." The Independants or Liberals were the favourites of the students, of the young men who stood for the New Ideas, the youth of the nation, whom Constant described as "full of generous sentiments, proud of our institutions and animated by an ardent zeal for their defence . . . lovers of Liberty and ready to nobly brave every peril for so splendid a cause . . . the forerunners of a generation which is to be better than ours."[1] Lafayette, the friend of Washington, and the disciple of the ideals of '89, was the hero of this *jeunesse*, and Constant was their patron saint. Their motto was, not "Vive le Roi," but "Vive le Roi *et la Charte!*" Within the Liberal party were the representatives of the large industrial and agricultural interests of the nation—capitalists, bankers, manufacturers, respected men, who hated the Court and ecclesiastical parties, and were hated by them. Added to these elements was that of the Bonapartists, military men like Lafayette, Sebastiani and Foy, and remnants of Jacobins whom the success of the Revolution in Spain stirred

[1] *Sur les troubles de Paris au mois de Juin*, 1820.

to hopes of a Bourbon collapse. Because Bonapartism was fast coming to stand for the Revolution and its ideals, the Liberals joined forces with them. "A monstrous alliance of Liberals and Bonapartists," the minister Richelieu called it. A satire of the time represents one of their candidates as crying out, "They claim that I am not a Liberal—I, who have served among the Mamelukes!" But Benjamin retaliated with his ironical definition of an "Independant, according to the Government." The *Moniteur*, the official paper, had declared that if the electors wanted to bestow their confidence on the genuine Independants, they would find them in the ranks of those who followed the lead of the Government and the Ministry. "I propose," said Constant, "to put this phrase in the dictionary of the Academy as a definition of the word independant: 'INDEPENDANT, *a man who follows the line traced by the Government and the Ministry!*'" [1] 1817

The Royalists and Liberals embarked on a lively war of pamphlets which greatly disquieted the Ministry, and in which Benjamin's peculiar talents soon took the lead. The first law brought forward by the Ministry of 1817 had been a step in the direction of the electoral reforms which the nation demanded and which Benjamin had in vain struggled to wrest from Napoleon. It abolished the old system of indirect elections, and gave the direct vote to every Frenchman over thirty who paid 300 francs in taxes. But there were many details which it left to be settled later, and in the discussion which these evoked in the Chamber, it soon became apparent that the Government was using the new law for its own purposes. As a sort of warning to voters to think for themselves and be on the alert, he wrote two pamphlets on the approaching elections in 1818, in the first of which, *Des Elections Prochaines*, he attacked the compromisers in the Government party, calling upon the electors to choose between those who believed that the best way to establish a constitution was to suspend it, and those who believed that when you had a constitution you could not enjoy it too completely. A sarcastic résumé of this appeal to the voters appeared in the *Journal de Paris*, a Government organ: "The Ministry has given us good and bad laws: the good are put there by the Independants; the bad by the Ministers and the Ministerialists!" The second pamphlet, a soliloquy of an elector, presumably a farmer or a provincial tradesman, about how he can best fulfil his new political privileges, brings out by simple and humorous instances the manner in which such laws as those in regard to

[1] *Notes sur quelques articles des Journaux.* 1817.

1817 religious toleration, the inviolability of national property, and the censorship of the Press, affect his private and financial welfare. It ends in the elector's resolution to go to the polls early in order to prepare his ballot correctly and independently, not to allow the fear of " throwing away his vote " to deter him from voting for the man he prefers, and to resist all suggestions from his wife that they take the election holiday for a picnic in the country. " If we have good deputies, we shall have plenty of holidays." [1] It is a clever appeal to the point of view of the middle-class elector, such as Constant used later with great success in his electoral journeys among his constituents in the Sarthe and in Alsace. *Des Elections Prochaines*, especially, was angrily attacked by the Ministerial papers; for its artful insinuations as to the practical effect of the Laws of Exception upon constitutional privileges endangered some of the Government's favourite measures. As he was prevented by the Press Law from defending himself against these attacks in the newspapers, he used the device of reprinting the hostile articles in a pamphlet of thirty-four pages (thus evading the censorship, which could not touch anything over thirty pages long), and put his replies in the footnotes.

Although in his discussions of the freedom of the press, he was accustomed to disavow any personal causes for complaint, his career as an editor, which began shortly after his return to England, suffered more than one check from the stringency of the Press Law. Desirous of providing a medium for the discussion of the new Electoral Law, which was to be the chief Government measure presented to the sessions of 1817–18, Constant had undertaken to resuscitate the nearly extinct *Mercure*, which in the days when La Harpe, Fievée, Michaud and Chateaubriand were among its collaborators, had been closely connected with the *Journal des Débats*. In his hands it soon assumed a Liberal tone which ranked it with the *Censeur* as an Opposition paper. At first he was almost alone in his enterprise, but he was soon joined by Aignan, Jouy, Lacretelle *aîné* (all Academicians), by Tissot, professor of Latin poetry in the Collège Royal, Esmenard, Dufresne, Saint-Léon and others. Aignan and Jouy wrote the literary articles, Dufresne the dramatic notes; the reviews of foreign affairs were signed Bénaben, and the notices of the sessions were unsigned. Constant wrote his cousins that he was using the journal as a frame for his own opinions, and that his work would be anonymous. In December he had

[1] *Entretien d'un Electeur avec lui-même.* First edition, 1817, anonymous; second edition, 1818, with his name.

to disown an article against Geneva which had called forth an indignant remonstrance from Charles, and to dispel the suspicion that " Bénaben " was his nom-de-plume. 1817

" I never read the *Mercure*, except the articles which I put in it, my dear Cousin. I have nothing to do with the management of this paper, for which I am not responsible except for what I myself have inserted in it, and for a month I have put nothing in. M. Bénaben is a very real person, who went on the Egyptian expedition, who is known for several works, and to whom the manager of the *Mercure* has entrusted the political part, both at home and abroad. I never read him, because what I see informs me about the home affairs, and the German and English newspapers about the foreign affairs better than he could do it. I only knew through Auguste de Staël that he had hurt Geneva, I do not know how, and I am very sorry for it. They have been very gracious to me in Geneva, and I am grateful for it. If I am annoyed it is at them for supposing that I wrote M. de Bénaben's articles. They never could have read me, or else must be very undiscerning in matters of style. M. Dumont, who is here, will swear to you the existence of Bénaben, when you so desire.

" As to the other papers, it is evident that you have no idea of our papers. The Ministry controls them entirely, so that it is not necessary to have any personal responsibility for what they contain. The *Moniteur* is the official paper. You do not suppose that I had the credit of inserting or abridging a line in it ? The *Quotidienne* is the paper of the Ultras. They insult me two or three times a week. It is clear then that I have no share in its articles. Furthermore, you attach a great deal too much importance to all this, and you see designs where there are none. If a paper sees a space to fill, it speaks of Geneva, as of anything else, well or ill as it occurs to it ; few people read it, no one thinks of it, and the whole thing is forgotten in half an hour.

" It is settled then that I am nothing in the direction nor in the spirit of the *Mercure*. I am withdrawing from it as much as I can, and have other things to do than to co-operate or even to read it, and it often seems to me either stupid, or in bad taste." (To Charles, 1817. Geneva Archives.)

Constant probably had his own reasons, in addition to the general desire to escape any publicity that might expose him to the attentions of the Censor, for not wishing to be too closely identified with the failing fortunes of the *Mercure*. The paper was not flourishing, partly owing to the censorship, and its influence was negligible at best. In January 1818 it was suddenly extinguished by the Government for publishing an extract from a book on the Concordat, by Jubé, which had escaped the vigilance of the Censor.

1818-19 The editors promptly reorganized, and in order to evade the Press law aimed against *periodicals*, announced that the new publication, under the name of *La Minerve Française*, would be in four volumes, which would be divided into fifty-two numbers, and would appear at *irregular* intervals. With mock courtesy, they informed the Minister of Police of this revival under a new name and method, and while proclaiming the consecration of the *Minerve* to the support of the *Charte* and the promotion of constitutional liberty in France, politely invited him to become a subscriber. The Government dared not raise the question of admitting the evasion lest it be debated in the Chamber, where the editors had a fair chance of winning their point, so it was obliged to be silent and to see the example of the *Minerve* become popular with other independent papers, new publications appearing every week under the "irregular interval" subterfuge. Most of these upstart journals survived but a few weeks, so that at the end of 1818 only twenty out of the fifty-six non-periodical journals remained; but the *Minerve* had better fortune, and soon became the accredited organ of the Liberal party, while the *Conservateur*, which was the Opposition paper that Chateaubriand, Fievée, and others had founded to oppose it, acquired the nickname of *La Minerve Blanche*.

To the old staff of the *Mercure* were now added Dumoulin, Jouy, Etienne and Pagès. A poem by the bard of the Liberals, Béranger, often appeared on the first page of the paper; Jouy, as the *Hermite en Province*, found texts for political instruction under the mask of provincial history; while Etienne's bright, spirited *Lettres sur Paris*, and Constant's polished and brilliant reviews of literature and politics, furnished the special attractions to which the *Minerve* owed its popularity. As far as Constant could control the *Minerve*, it was distinguished from the other Liberal papers by its reasonableness and moderation—so much so, indeed, that the *Journal des Débats* scorned its Liberalism as "sham." Its other editors, however, were less restrained, and when in the spring of 1819 the temporary removal of the censorship permitted a freer expression of opinion, and the press revelled in the exchange of abuse, he and Aignan, with Pagès and Jouy, gradually severed their active connection with the *Minerve* and founded the *Renommée*. But it had been Constant's leadership that had put the *Minerve* in the first rank among the journals of the Restoration, and that had, through its pages, brought into line with the Liberal party all the scattering critics of the Government who placed principles above men or party.

The agitation that succeeded the assassination of the Duc de Berri in February 1820 proved fatal to the *Minerve*. "I have seen the Knife," wrote Charles Nodier in the *Journal des Débats*; "It is a Liberal doctrine." The privilege of free speech had been abused; the licence into which it had degenerated was laid at the door of the Ministry which had permitted the relaxation of the censorship laws, and to appease the outraged Royalists the Ministry hastened to muzzle the press again. Among the scores of journals that were suppressed was the *Minerve*, and thereby the Liberals were deprived of a powerful means of influencing public opinion in the coming elections. To follow the vicissitudes of the censorship of the press under the Restoration, or to trace the rise and fall of the various newspapers with which Constant was identified either as editor or contributor, is not within the scope of this biography. Even at the rare periods when the press was legally free, the censorship usually continued to exist under one pretext or another, and every day there were fresh suspensions of periodicals for some trifling offence. Under this persecution editorial staffs changed, old-established papers disappeared or reappeared under a new name, and except the *Moniteur*, which was always the official organ of whatever Government was in power, the transformations in their political affiliations are equally bewildering. And when it is remembered that Constant was a prolific writer for the press, and that during these years of his political activities scarcely a day passed that some article from his pen did not appear in one or another of the less conservative journals, it will be evident that a study of his relations to the Restoration press might well fill a separate volume. Yet some consideration of this very important issue in his public life is indispensable to a complete picture of his many-sided character. It was, moreover, through his zeal as a champion of Liberty of the Press and his indefatigable agitation in the papers of this and of other liberties which he believed essential to a free and enlightened government, that he succeeded in attaining the prominence in the Liberal movement at which he aimed. But this leadership involved the sacrifice of many of his old relations. 1820

Now that he was drifting away from the moderate views of his old friends the Doctrinaires, the salons where he was accustomed to meet Barante, de Broglie, Camille Jordan were as uncongenial as the Royalist circle who gathered about Mme. Récamier. He began to find himself more at home in the drawing-room of Mme. Davilliers, where Deputies and young journalists of every shade

1817 of Liberalism mingled with retired Ministers and Generals, derelicts of the Empire, who made common cause with the critics of the existing Government. In this circle Constant was much courted for his wit and his talents. Here, too, came Béranger, the bard of the Liberals, whose little *chansons* were passed about privately in this society when the journals no longer dared to print them. Béranger, who "made fun of everybody but Manuel," had not much love for Constant; and on Benjamin's part, notwithstanding that he visited the unfortunate author of the famous *Cocarde Blanche* when he was imprisoned for the daring caricatures of the Bourbons in his verses, there was little sympathy for the bourgeois hatred of aristocracy that inspired his Muse.

As long as Mme. de Staël lived, Benjamin continued to appear at her salons, but with her death the last tie with that environment in which he had received his initiation into political life was severed. At daybreak on the 14th of July, that day fraught with so much significance for her and for the cause she had loved, she passed away in her sleep, after long months of suffering. Her end came just at the time when Benjamin was occupied with his pamphlets on the Liberty of the Press, in preparation for the coming elections, which he hoped would send him to the Chamber of Deputies. Although the passion he had once felt for her was buried under new and engrossing interests, her death revived all the memories and the pain connected with their estrangement, and he wrote to Humboldt, in reply to a letter of condolence:

"There is a gloomy and heavy apathy at the bottom of my heart. . . . I no longer have courage for anything, because, unconsciously, even after a long absence and almost habitual separation, I referred everything to Mme. de Staël, and I no longer have a thought which does not recall her and which is not tortured by the sense of her loss. What you say is cruelly true; the coverings in which Time wraps our souvenirs are torn off by death, and the past appears with reality, while what we thought to be real life fades and is extinguished."

Rosalie, calling upon Albertine at Coppet after the funeral, was gratified to learn from her how honourably he had discharged his financial obligations to Mme. de Staël's children, and also that he was progressing in public esteem and gaining consideration in Paris, and that he stood a good chance of success in the approaching elections.

The elections of 1817 were watched with the keenest interest, for they were the first to take place under the new law which

provided for direct elections, and they were notable for their 1817
demonstration of the growing power of the Liberals. There were three parties in the field—the Ultras, the Ministerials, and the new Liberal party—and the appearance of the names of Lafayette, Manuel and Constant among the candidates was regarded by the more conservative as ominous. Owing, however, to the strenuous efforts of the Government, they were all three defeated by a small majority, although on the whole the Liberals scored a victory. Undiscouraged, Constant continued his efforts to educate the public mind through the press, and especially to address the agricultural and industrial classes in the Departments where the Liberal cause was bound to be most popular. The Liberals claimed to be the defenders of the lowly and the oppressed, wherever they were found, from the peasants, suffering from the greed of the aristocracy, to the enslaved blacks of St. Domingo and the Greeks struggling against the inhumanities of the Turks. Thus we find Constant undertaking the defence of the Norman peasant, Wilfrid Regnault, condemned to death on the charge of theft, followed by murder, on circumstantial evidence which was coloured in the eyes of the judges by the suspicion that he had taken part in the prison massacres of September 1792. The case afforded Constant an opportunity, not only to make himself popular with the people as the friend of the labouring man, but to serve his party by exhibiting the arbitrary and partisan methods of the Courts of Justice. He showed himself an excellent criminal lawyer in the two pamphlets in behalf of Regnault which he addressed to the humane lawyer in the Court of Appeals, M. Odillon-Barrot; and his second letter to the King, accompanied by a petition from the lawyer himself, gained the commutation of Regnault's sentence.

It was partly from a naturally sympathetic and humane disposition, and partly out of zeal for the professions of his party, that Benjamin was so frequently engaged in efforts for the remission of sentences, especially those of hot-headed youthful conspirators. His adhesion to the society of *Les Amis de la Liberté de la Presse*, however, was mainly a political move in defiance of the Government. The imprisonment of Chevalier, editor of the *Bibliographie Historique*, and one of the editors of the *Censeur*, for an attack upon the Ministry, had led to the organization of this society in 1817, under the leadership of the Duc de Broglie. Its avowed object was to give financial aid to friends of liberty who were fined or imprisoned for free speech, and its meetings were held at the houses of some of its members, notably at de Broglie's, Constant's and Manuel's. There

1818 were also banquets at the *Arc-en-Ciel*. When in course of time the society became the centre of Bonapartist and advanced Liberal views, such as were held by the younger members of the party, de Broglie ceased to attend it, and even Constant seldom came to its meetings. In 1819 the King, who had always hated it—calling it "that infernal Club"—desired the Ministers to break it up. A forgotten article of the Penal Code, forbidding the assembling of societies of more than twenty persons, was resurrected for the purpose, and an attempt was made to imprison some of those at whose houses the *Amis de la Liberté de la Presse* had met. Amid the publicity given to the society by the Government prosecution, de Broglie was keeping very quiet about his former connection with it, when Constant slyly printed in the *Renommée* a list of the Deputies of the Right and of the Centre who had belonged to it at one time or another. Although this clever move was so embarrassing to the Government that it was forced to content itself with disbanding the Club and confining its punishment to less prominent members than had been first selected, it was equally embarrassing to the Doctrinaires of the Centre, and an additional reason for his unpopularity with his former friends.

But it strengthened his influence in the Liberal party, and made him popular with the electors. In the autumn of 1818 the Department of La Sarthe[1] turned out her four Ultra deputies and elected three Liberals. Two of them declined to serve, so Lafayette, who had just been defeated in the Department of La Seine-et-Marne, was elected to one of the vacancies. Constant had also been defeated in the same Department as Lafayette. The Royalists, in dismay at finding his name again among the candidates, had tried to induce him to withdraw it in favour of Manuel, whom they stood a good chance of defeating. This he had indignantly declined to do, and was elected on the first round of voting; but the Government rallied all its forces against him, with the result that on the second and last rounds he was defeated, by a very small majority. But in the meantime his spirited articles in the *Minerve* had attracted the attention of Goyet, the editor of the chief Liberal paper of La Sarthe. This energetic man, whom the Royalists called "The Great Elector," made up his mind to have Benjamin elected to the remaining vacancy in the representation of La Sarthe.

Goyet was a clever, pushing, boastful, egotistical character, a type of the middle-class Liberal leader in the provinces. He had

[1] Part of the old province of Maine, between Normandy on the north and Anjou and Touraine on the south.

founded his paper, the *Propagateur*, the preceding year, with a view 1819
to crystallizing the Liberal enthusiasm he foresaw would break out when the new election laws gave it a chance. Being a native of the Department of La Sarthe, he had considerable influence with the agricultural and manufacturing classes of that region, and his fiery talk about persecutions and counter-revolutions and clerical plots stirred them to action. Naturally he was abhorred by the prefect of La Sarthe, who declared that it was impossible for him to preserve order while such a man was permitted to foment trouble, and Goyet had been arrested several times for making speeches against the administration. In the gifted and intrepid editor of the *Minerve*, which, he said, was "not a journal but a national monument," he thought that he beheld the future deliverer of La Sarthe from the paw of the Royalists, and he offered to conduct Benjamin's campaign as Deputy for that Department.

"Benjamin is escorting around Paris a certain Goyet, a journalist from La Sarthe," wrote de Broglie contemptuously, "who treats him in a free-and-easy fashion; and this Goyet said to M. Décazes, in his presence, 'If I had been eligible I would have got myself elected instead of M. Constant.'"

Goyet's patronage proved valuable, and in March, Constant found himself Deputy from La Sarthe. Rosalie read in the paper the news of her cousin's triumph and hastened to write Charles of her faith in his success in the Chamber.

"He must be very happy at this moment. Whatever the results in other respects, I believe he will speak with as much eloquence as he writes. Already in the Tribunat he had overcome the defect of his voice. He has more wit, gift for the impromptu, the apropos, for finding precisely the word for the occasion, than any one else. . . . Remember what he has said against written speeches and how he wished it were only permitted to extemporize! He knew all the advantage he had over others. Well, we shall see! His address to the Department of the Sarthe will not propitiate the Ultras. . . . The greatest mistake that I can see for him would be to be made a Minister. Write and speak—yes; but act—no!" (April 8, 1819. Geneva Archives.)

Immediately after his election, availing himself of a custom inaugurated the previous year by Camille Jordan, Constant made a patriotic address to his electors,[1] in the form of a "Letter to the Inhabitants of the Department of the Sarthe," in which he reaffirmed the principles he had already professed to them—liberty of conscience

[1] Printed in the *Minerve* in March.

1819 and of industry, and of the press, observance of the laws, personal security, the inviolability of judicial forms, and the rights of the communes, whose individual interests must be respected; and pledged himself to fight in the coming sessions for the two measures indispensable to the maintenance of these principles—that of the Responsibility of Ministers and of their agents, and the Freedom of the Press. Not only during the two years that he represented the Sarthe in the Chamber, but to the very end of his life, these were the principles to whose establishment and preservation his efforts were dedicated.

The condition of the Sarthe at the time when Constant became its deputy was bad. It had been in this Department that the Vendéans were defeated in 1793 by General Marceau, whose victorious troops had massacred many thousands of Royalists in the streets of the towns. In consequence, it was one of the most oppressed and unsettled of the Departments and particularly afflicted by the *Lois d'Exception*. Only recently its Prefect of Police, Pasquier, had pronounced six hundred and twenty-two destitutions, only five of which had been restored. Severe laws existed against individual liberty, seditious writings, speeches or cries; and the judgment of its courts were without appeal and could be executed in twenty-four hours. Its fiscal system was corrupt. Fifteen thousand Prussians of the Army of Occupation had been quartered upon it, and as yet no reimbursement of the value of the food requisitioned for their support had been obtained. Through the clergy, who were very powerful in the Sarthe, the Ultras had gained control of the Charity and School funds, and political heresies were punished by the refusal of absolution and burial. The *émigrés* were even agitating the restoration of their forfeited property in this Department, and the Prefect, who was their creature, did not interfere. Business was greatly handicapped by these conditions, and there were many failures. All this furnished an object-lesson for the doctrines Constant was struggling to propagate.[1] Clearly, he and his supporters declared, the only remedy for the troubles of the Sarthe was an immediate and thorough application of the principles of the *Charte*, and of the Electoral Law of 1817. Although in the heat of the contest that raged about the preservation of constitutional liberties it was less to the specific abuses in his Department than to the general principles that underlay them that his attention was given, his zeal and industry were untiring. During the period that

[1] See Constant's *Discours*, i. pp. 167, 173, where he sets forth the afflictions of Sarthe.

he was Deputy from the Sarthe, he spoke two hundred and seventy- 1819–20
five times, and his constituents were, according to Goyet's testimony, not only satisfied but proud of their representative. Goyet himself encouraged him to put his full strength into these larger interests of the nation, which must be regulated before the lesser evils of the Departments could be removed. His attitude towards his candidate was a mixture of adulation and patronizing solicitude. He expressed unbounded satisfaction with Constant's performance of his duties—the "French Fox," he called him—and assured him that visitors to Paris returned to the province full of pride in their gifted representative, that his speeches made a "prodigious sensation" among the electors, and that the Sarthe was the envy of the other Departments on account of the brilliancy of its Deputy. On the other hand, he made bold to chide Benjamin for too great moderation. "Your resolutions are sometimes timid; sometimes I have noticed too much deference for the opinions of others." He also undertook to teach this neophyte in political obligations that even his private life was not his own, but his country's and his party's. "All the Patriots are alarmed about your health," he wrote after Benjamin's fall in the Chamber, which crippled him for life.[1] "As often as possible dine at home, and *maritalement*." And after the celebrated duel (June 1822) with Forbin des Issarts, occasioned by a controversy waged through the pages of the *Quotidienne* and the *Constitutionnel*, when, being still on crutches, the Deputy from the Sarthe fought seated in an armchair, Goyet was in convulsions over such useless disregard of his dignity and his life (both of which belonged not to himself but to his constituents) in this "parody of a duel." And it is presumable that Benjamin hearkened to the advice and reproofs of the "great Elector" to whom he was indebted for his office, for he was dependent on him still for his influence in Sarthe. "Remember," Goyet wrote him, "I LEAD public opinion."

The chief object of the legislation in Parliament during the ten years that Constant was a member of the Chamber of Deputies, was the establishment of a working basis for the government of France. Three great laws—called *Lois d'Exception* because the

[1] In July 1818 Rosalie wrote Charles (MS. Geneva) that Sismondi had told her of a fall Benjamin had at Mme. Davillier's at Neuilly, when he "was trying to show some ladies how nimble and young he was," and stumbled over a piece of wood he was trying to jump, nearly breaking his neck in the hole into which he fell. His knee never recovered from this accident, and later he fell again, in the Chamber, and his lameness became fixed upon him. Charles thought his crutches rather effective and a valuable asset in the Chamber.

1820–21 Liberals claimed that they violated, while the Ministerialists claimed that they supplemented, the *Charte* by which Louis XVIII. was supposed to govern—were the centre about which the contest raged, and with each new session of Parliament, and each change of ministry, they were brought up again for discussion and renewal or amendment. These were the Electoral Law, the Law limiting Individual Liberty, and the Law regulating the Freedom of the Press. In all the heated debates which their consideration inevitably evoked, Constant was a leader, for he, more clearly than any one else, perceived that they were the foundation principles upon which the future liberties of France were to be built, and he was admittedly one of the greatest authorities on Parliamentary Government in the Chamber. Whatever other legislation Parliament was called upon to pass—the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs, the compensation of the *émigrés*, the settlement of treaties and indemnities—with the allies, with Spain, with St. Domingo, with the Pope, and with Naples—all were after all secondary in importance to the great fundamental question upon which all laws depended—of whether the *Charte* owed its existence to the King, or the King derived his powers from the *Charte*. Royalists and Liberals answered the question, each in their own way: "Are you or are you not, in favour of Legitimacy?" asked the *Journal des Débats* of its Liberal opponent, the *Constitutionnel*. "We are for the *Charte*, which contains Legitimacy," was the reply. "But what would you do if a legitimate prince tried to destroy the *Charte*?" "That would be impossible!" Sooner or later, every discussion that was raised in the Chamber of Deputies came back to one of the Laws of Exception or to the *Charte*, and when the last word seemed to have been said, the voting of the Budget never failed to provoke a few final shots from the Liberals. Upon these eternal questions the stormy sessions of 1820 and 1821 nearly shipwrecked the Government, and wherever the smoke of battle was thickest, Constant was sure to be found, the pride of the Left and the idol of all young Liberals, and the special abomination of the Right and of the Ministerialists.

The question of the Electoral Law turned upon whether the election should be "direct" and democratic, or "double" and aristocratic; and whether the renewal of the Chamber should be integral, which was the method advocated by Benjamin, or by fifths, which was more favourable to the Government. The question of the Press was one of censorship or freedom; of prevention or correction, of trial by jury or by the Police Courts; of

the responsibility of publishers, and the limits of free speech. 1820–21
Once having mastered these distinctions and decided upon which side the preference lay, the question of voting was a simple matter to determine, since every new bill which was presented, be it concerned with the administrations of the Departments, or with the right to petition, or with national expenditures, or the treatment of the blacks of St. Domingo, fell on one side or the other of the press and election controversy. Only once, and for a brief interval, did the material interests of the Right lead it into an illusory combination with the Left on the question of the press, but an alliance so evidently artificial was soon dissolved, and the contest raged fiercer than ever.

Between these two implacable antagonists the Ministry endeavoured to perform certain acrobatic feats of balancing and contortion, leaning more often to the side of the Right, where, rather than on the volcanic Left, it felt that safety lay; and depending for what little stability it had on the frail support of the Centre or Doctrinaires, as they were called. The only Minister who ever loved the Left, even a little, was Décazes, the King's favourite, who was responsible for that Electoral Law of 1817 which had made possible the victories of the Independents, and who had introduced some modifications in the stringent press laws. But the enmity of the Royalists which his Liberalism brought upon him, and the strong measures necessitated by their attempts to checkmate his policy, gradually forced him to withdraw from a path which threatened to ruin him, and in the end the Left criticized him almost as severely as the Right did. To his supposed Liberal sympathies, however, the Royalists traced the responsibility for the murder of the Duc de Berri by a fanatical Revolutionist. He was thus forced to yield the direction of the government to the Duc de Richelieu, and the Liberals lost their only friend. From that time until the disastrous ministry of Polignac, under whom the follies that led to the Revolution of July were committed, there was an ever-increasing preponderance in favour of Ultra-Royalist legislation, and a corresponding crescendo of hatred on the part of the Liberal Opposition.

For the leadership of the unpopular side Constant was eminently qualified by his gifts and his temperament. Yet he was less a leader of the Liberals than the spokesman of the Independent element within that very composite body. The extreme views of his Jacobin colleagues were as repugnant to him as the militarism and plottings of the Bonapartists, and like all Independents, he was abused by all sides, for those who were pledged to one party

1818 or policy could never comprehend his singleness of aim, which, in seeking realization, could utilize all methods and discard all formulas. His enemies delighted to accuse him of inconsistency in his words and his principles, and it was in vain that he tried to explain himself. Even his admirers and colleagues were so far from comprehending his independence that they preferred to ignore or forget what they suspected to be weakness or insincerity. When, in 1818, he published under the title of *Cours de Politique* the first two volumes (completed by two more in 1819 and 1820) of his collected writings on the principles of representative government,[1] his opponents set to work to pick out every passage in which he had altered or omitted the text of the originals, and as Benjamin's ideas grew and developed and he was never ashamed to change his opinions as to the best methods of securing the unchanging principles for which he worked, he afforded them an easy target. His protest against the Barthélémy Proposition,[2] for example, was answered by a pert little pamphlet, *Guerre à Qui Cherche*, written by the youthful editor of the *Publiciste*, Charles Loyson, in which the apparently inconsistent passages in Constant's political writings were put into the form of a dialogue between "M. Benjamin," "M. Constant" and "M. Rebecque." "No one ever supposed," wrote Loyson in response to Constant's rejoinder to this attack, "that you pretended to the honour of political steadfastness. Every one has his own merit and no one dreamed of expecting this was yours. Still less was I astonished at the method you had devised to persuade us of it. It consisted in publishing your different pamphlets with changes and suppressions, wherein the only invariable thing was your own wonderfully subtle and forcible style." Constant's retaliations for these thrusts were always so much more witty and clever than the attack, that he easily disarmed his opponent.[3]

[1] *Collection complète des ouvrages publiés sur le Gouvernement Représentatif, formant une espèce de Cours de Politique Constitutionnelle.* 1818–1820. In 1836, Pagès de l'Ariège, his friend and colleague, published a new edition less complete than the first. In 1861, and again in 1872, Laboulaye republished the *Cours de Politique*, omitting some of the original pieces, such as the *Annals* of the Session, but adding *Les Principes de Politiques, L'Esprit de Conquête, Les Effets de la Terreur, Des Réactions Politiques*, etc.

[2] A proposition emanating from the clerical party to ask the King to abrogate the Electoral Law.

[3] In reply to Constant's charge that he had been misrepresented and misquoted by him, Loyson published a second pamphlet, with the motto: *Sola inconstans constans.*

Although it is easy to see that Constant could not readily 1819
conform to any particular party, still the Liberals offered the freest platform, and thus he soon came to be classed with the Opposition along with Sebastiani, Manuel,[1] Foy, Lafitte, D'Argenson and Lafayette, names with which his is always associated in the political Memoirs and Histories of the Restoration. Few of these men, however, belonged to his own social class. Lafayette and D'Argenson were, to be sure, members of the old nobility; the former "devoured by a canine appetite for popularity," in the opinion of Thomas Jefferson; and the other equally zealous in all sorts of Revolutionary conspiracies. But the others were for the most part rich men of the manufacturing or commercial class, haters of aristocrats and clericals; or, like Foy and Sebastiani, retired generals who had served the cause of Liberty with their swords and now served it with their rhetoric. Lafitte, the rich banker who played so active a part in the Revolution of July, is said by Thureau-Dangin to have written Béranger in 1837, "What a rabble, my dear Béranger, are our friends of the last fifteen years!"

Two weeks after his election Constant inaugurated his career in the Chamber by a speech upon a subject which soon came to be regarded as his special field, that of the press laws. This maiden speech was practically an exhaustive treatise containing all that could be said about freedom of the press, and the manner of trying offences of the press. As yet, he had not developed the ironical and the disconcerting tricks of argument, for which he became famous later, and his attitude toward the Ministry was on the whole moderate and conciliatory. He spoke sixteen times during this short spring session.

The session which was opened by the King on the 29th of November was to prove, before its close in the summer of 1820, the stormiest in the agitated history of Restoration parliaments, and Benjamin soon came to the front as one of the fiercest fighters. The eager crowds who filled the Quais and the bridges, and thronged the corridors and galleries of the historic Palais Bourbon, where the Deputies assembled, testified to the importance of the questions which were to be debated, and to the uncertainty of the results. To each party it seemed that the fate of Liberty or of the Monarchy, as the case might be, hung upon the decisions which were to be

[1] Celebrated by Béranger as the "ideal statesman" and reviled by Thureau-Dangin as the "personification of bourgeois Liberalism." Expelled from the Chamber in 1823, by the Right, for treasonable words about the Bourbons.

1819 made ; and the vagueness of Louis' allusions to the subjects which were filling all men's minds—the Electoral Law, and the freedom of the press—was a great disappointment to the nation. The session was also made memorable by the sensation caused by the election of the regicide and ex-Bishop, Grégoire, to the Chamber. The agitation was occasioned, not by the question of his admission —that was recognized by all parties to be impossible—but of the grounds of his exclusion ; whether it should rest on the illegality of his election, since he was not an inhabitant of the Department that had returned him, or upon the affront to the King of having a regicide in the Chamber. Constant answered Lainé's fiery and eloquent presentation of the "indignity" plea, by a clear, cool piece of dialectic, which, without saying a word in favour of Grégoire, took the ground that the affront to the King lay not in the *admission* of regicides, but in their *exclusion*, since Louis had not only solemnly ratified that article of the Charte which pardoned the banished regicides, but had admitted Fouché to his Council in 1814. For these tactics of carrying the war into their own territory the Royalists were not prepared, and henceforth it became a favourite device of the Liberals to disarm the King's party by their own tender protection of his prerogatives or his principles, based always on the assumption that the observance of the spirit and letter of the *Charte* was Louis' dearest desire. All infringements of the *Charte* were thus laid at the door of the Ministry. Thus Louis' address at the opening of the session, which had so disappointed the nation, was asserted in the *Minerve* to be the work of the ministers, not of the King. Now, if there was one thing in which Louis took a special pride, it was the preparation of his speeches. He always wrote them himself, and quite independently of any advice from his ministers, and the Liberals knew quite as well as he that the unpopular allusions in that address to the "pernicious principles, which, under the mask of Liberty, attacked the social order," were entirely his own. It was typical of the independent attitude which Constant had assumed from the first, that when appointed to serve upon a committee to frame a reply thanking the King for his Address, four drafts of the reply were presented by the committee to the Chamber, three of which represented the three party divisions in the Chamber, while the fourth was exclusively Constant's. All four replies were rejected, and he was not reappointed on the new committee.

The Ministry, led by the Duc de Richelieu, was now launched

upon a reactionary policy which resulted in the passing of the 1820
three great *Lois d'Exception*, summed up by the *Constitutionnel* as follows: "Article I.: The Ministers may prevent the French from writing; Article II.: The Ministers may have all the French imprisoned; Article III.: The Ministers may appoint all the Deputies!" While the newspapers on both sides profited by the brief interval of freedom that remained to them, in exchanging the compliments that the situation called forth, the *Minerve*, we are told by Duvergier de Hauranne (the impartial historian of parliamentary government in France, and a member of the Chamber during the Restoration), "had among her editors a man, who, while making some voluntary concessions to the passion of the moment, knew how to gauge and utilize them for his own ends." This man was Benjamin Constant and in a pamphlet[1] setting forth the motives that he believed to have prompted the Royalists to frame the new Electoral Law, he played very cunningly on these passions, and on the suspicions of the good faith of the Bourbons which ever lurked in the minds of the people, by demonstrating that while the old law had merely fortified the Ministry, the new one would lead straight to an oligarchy.

The scenes in the Chamber while the new law was under discussion were hectic and noisy, with Benjamin always in the foreground, directing party tactics, commenting, interrogating, interrupting, proposing or defying amendments, making long speeches, and blocking the Government projects by every device known to skilful politicians; yet, all the time that he was exasperating the Royalists by his cutting analyses and subtle insinuations, he was writing pamphlets and preparing articles for the papers, even while sitting at his desk in the Chamber, with the combat going on about him. For two weeks the battle raged, and the bitterest insults were exchanged. Amid derisive shouts Benjamin congratulated himself that he was yet able to make himself heard "in a Tribunat still free, by a miracle, amid a dumb and enslaved France!" Never before, says Pasquier, the minister who defended the Government's Bills, had the discussions in the Tribune had so decisive an influence on political issues.

"For perhaps the first time in France, the parties were so exactly balanced in the Chamber of Deputies, the votes were so evenly divided between the two sides, that each question as it was presented and discussed, might have a solution which was favour-

[1] *Des Motifs qui ont dicté le nouveau Projet de Loi sur les Élections.* May 1820.

1820 able or adverse to the Government. It needed but one imprudent word, one ill-chosen argument, or a fear or a hope well or awkwardly expressed, on one side or the other, in order to cause a dozen fluctuating votes to pass over to the Right or the Left, and decide everything. . . . It was not a question of eloquence but of skill."

Deputies rose from their sick-beds to add the weight of their presence or their votes to the balance of the contest, and the crowning sensation came when the Liberal Deputy Chauvelin was borne on his litter from his sick-bed to the Palais Bourbon, escorted through a rain which poured in torrents, by a noisy and enthusiastic procession of young men and students. He was carried into the Chamber just at the dramatic moment, to cast into the urn the last vote which turned the scales in favour of the Liberal motion that Camille Jordan's amendment to the Electoral Bill should be considered. The episode of Chauvelin had tragic consequences, for, student demonstrations having become fashionable, and the Royalist *jeunesse* having proclaimed their patriotism by attempting to drown the Liberal cries of *Vive la Charte!* by *Vive le Roi!*, zeal degenerated into violence.[1] During a charge of the Guards, which was ordered to quell the disturbances, a young Liberal student, named Lallemand, was shot and killed. The Liberals reaped the most possible profit out of the sad accident, and Benjamin was more than once on his feet to demand "protection for the Deputies in the exercise of their duties," and to praise the blameless behaviour of the young Liberals as distinguished from the rudeness of the young Royalists. The Right, in turn, charged him with having arranged the whole affair as a political move. In March he wrote Rosalie from his seat in the Chamber :

"We are in the midst of the stormiest session yet. The fight is on while I write. I have written nothing since my letter to the Minister of War. . . . I have too much to do and things are too much upset."

On the 7th of that month he made his great speech on the Law to limit Individual Liberty, which had been presented on the

[1] On June 4, Villèle wrote his wife that the disturbances were artificial, the people taking no part in them and the participants being only medical students and young literary men, "montés" by Constant, and clerks "poussés" by Lafitte, and that the whole affair was in his opinion merely an attempt of Manuel, Lafitte and Benjamin Constant to influence the more timid members of the Chamber, and to give the effect of unpopularity to the changes in the Electoral Law. (*Mémoires et Corr.*)

previous day, and there is the ring of profound sincerity in his sentiment and his indignation when he says : 1820

" This is one of the questions which one cannot approach without deep discouragement and bitter sadness. To continually recommence a fruitless labour, to take a few steps in the direction of legal liberty, to conceive some hopes and to see oneself pushed back upon Despotism, . . . is this to be the eternal fate of France ? Will successive governments always persist in fighting against their own stability ? . . . Gentlemen, the law which you propose is destructive, not only of the liberty, but of the justice, the morality, the confidence, the industry, the prosperity of France. There is no virtue which will not be degraded, no interest which will not be hurt, by such a law. . . . Gentlemen, two ways are open to you ; for two years, even when the Ministry has erred, the representatives of the nation have walked in the direction of Constitutionalism. Do you wish to leave it ? Do you wish to enter on Laws of Exception ? The Convention, the Directoire, Bonaparte, governed by Laws of Exception. Where is the Convention ? Where is the Directoire ? Where is Bonaparte ?

" I vote for the rejection of the two propositions." [1]

Nevertheless, the Bill passed by a majority of nineteen. In the collected works of Constant there are six pamphlets (exclusive of chapters in longer treatises), and forty speeches in the Chamber of Deputies, on the subject of the " incredible combination " of the law to " destroy publicity," *i.e.* the Press Bill, which followed closely upon the law to " destroy Liberty." Seven of these speeches were delivered in the Chamber in the ten days during which the Censorship Bill was being debated, and when that Bill also passed, and the Electoral Bill was presented, he abandoned oratory and took to stratagem. His action in trying to force a debate on the Budget, and thus to get the discussion of the Bill postponed until the next session, would, had it succeeded, have meant another election under the old law, and a complete ministerial defeat. But others in his party were not as far-sighted as he, and the Ministers succeeded in holding back the Budget until the Bill was passed. In the twenty-five days occupied by the " battle of the elections," as it was called, forty-four long orations were delivered, the most bitter animosities were aroused, and the interest of the nation was at the highest tension. Throngs filled the quays and the Pont Louis XV. and the corridors of the Palais Bourbon, awaiting the final vote on the measure, and not until the 10th of June did it finally pass, by a majority of fifty-nine for the Government. The

[1] *Disc.* i., No. 25.

1820–22 session was unlike any that had preceded it, says Duvergier de Hauranne, in that it was not a parliamentary session but one of civil war. Previously all questions had been discussed for themselves; now they were only a pretext and the discussions a weapon. From the time of the King's opening address, Royer-Collard declares, there were only two parties in France, those who were for and those who were against, the Electoral Law.

The Chamber was exhausted after the excitement of the debate, but Benjamin was still quite fresh, and when the deputies settled down peacefully to discuss the Budget, he wickedly rose to insist on having specifications of the precise way in which the money was to be spent, and thus started another discussion which postponed the adjournment until the 22nd of July.

Charles de Constant visited Paris in 1822, and was surprised at his cousin's industry and importance, and reassured as to his moderation and consistency. He attended a session of the Chamber, and was impressed to hear the buzz in the Visitors' Gallery when Benjamin came limping into the Chamber, in his silver-embroidered deputy's coat (which he always kept on in order to be in readiness to mount the Tribune when an opportune moment occurred), and with his arms full of books and papers, and began to write busily as soon as he had taken his seat. "There is Benjamin, the one who came in on crutches," was whispered about among the strangers who had come to see the famous Deputy. Charles observed, however, that most of the exclamations came from publishers and booksellers, who had good reason to applaud Benjamin for his championship of the Press. An Italian Princess of Liberal sympathies, who sat among them, would, he thought, have thrown herself upon his neck, had she known that the quiet, little gentleman in spectacles beside her was related to the famous Deputy, for Benjamin was plainly "her political saint."[1] For he was much admired in Italy, and Stendhal, writing from Rome in 1820, remarked that every Italian town had its coterie of young men with whom the writing of verses, presumably in the vein of Béranger, and the reading of Constant's speeches, was practised with enthusiasm in token of their progressive views. "But there is no one in Italy capable of writing a page like Constant," he added; and to his friend, Baron de Moresti, who asked for guidance in the literature of Liberalism, he recommended the reading of Jefferson, "and more of Benjamin Constant; it is pap for babes."

[1] From Charles de Constant's *Journal de mon voyage en France*, 1822. (Geneva Archives.)

Constant's wit and aplomb were the delight of his party, who 1820–22
called him " our Benjamin." The printed reports of his speeches are punctuated with parenthetical exclamations of " Bravo ! " " Applause ! " " Laughter ! " " Sensation ! " and he was as little affected by the applause as by the hisses and invectives of his opponents. Superior in education and intelligence as well as in breeding, to many of the deputies, his clear, relentless logic, his concise and subtle language, his agility in argument, the unexpectedness of his retorts, embarrassed and irritated his adversaries, who were no match for him. He knew the art, say those who heard him, of luring his opponent into a snare which he had set for him, and leaving him there helpless, felled by a sudden cutting epigram. " Always witty, in the midst of his most earnest appeals, always polite in the midst of his irony, always perfectly cool in his anger," says Loménie, " he said everything he wanted to say, in defiance of every authority or restriction." Even the Duc de Broglie, whose estimate of his one-time friend was inevitably modified by political differences and personal resentments, acknowledged that he spoke better than any one else. He describes his appearance in the Tribune : " a singular figure . . . with his white hair which makes him resemble a Protestant clergyman. He speaks in a monotone and begins hesitatingly, continually moving his right arm, and in proportion as he grows animated this movement accelerates. One would say that he was working himself into a passion, and when he attains it he generally speaks with power." Although he usually read his speeches from little scraps of paper which he was constantly sorting and turning in his hand, he gave the effect of extemporaneous speech. Rosalie, in her quiet parlour at Ouchy, listened complacently to the reports brought back to her by fellow-townsmen who had been in Paris, and who reported that in certain circles Benjamin was regarded as the " oracle and the pillar of just government." Auguste de Staël assured her that he had given up gambling and that he was gaining daily in public esteem. At this time shop windows began to display his portraits, more or less idealized, to be sure ; and laudatory sketches of his career were appearing in the biographies of the popular deputies, where Rosalie was amazed to read references to his " beautiful hair " and to hear him accused of " too much restraint of manner." " *Time will do wonders*, as my aunt used to say," was her comment. Charles, too, reported that he had never seen Benjamin carry himself with so much dignity, nor dressed so carefully and neatly, nor his " beautiful blond hair " arranged with so much art and coquetry.

1820 The oddness of his appearance and manner in the Chamber is described in an article which appeared in the *West End Review*[1] after his death, and which was reprinted in the *Temps* of March 12, 1833:

"He always wore, when he arrived, his costume of deputy, blue embroidered with silver . . . an old round hat on his head, under his arms a redingote, books, manuscript, printer's proofs, the budget and his crutch. He took his seat at the extreme left and began at once to write and dispatch notes and letters in infinite and incredible number, at the same time correcting proofs, making notes of speeches and answering the questions of those who pressed around. . . . When his turn came to speak he seemed to select a few papers by chance, and walked slowly to his place. Once he began to speak, his peculiarities were forgotten. . . . At first his long pale face of Puritanical cast was immovable, his voice monotonous, his speech slow, but as he warmed up his big blue eyes flashed with sudden light. . . . One could listen for hours without weariness. . . . He loved calmly and quietly to stir up the passions of his adversaries by a neat pleasantry, which disarmed them even while it excited their mirth. . . . But especially on the subject of the Liberty of the Press he was always fresh and warm."

Miss Berry, who was in Paris in 1826 and went to hear Benjamin, as being one of the great orators of the Chamber, wrote in her journal:

"He speaks always in a manner to command attention, always with an abundance of manner and words; often with eloquence and still oftener with that keen sarcasm and grave persiflage which marks his conversation. His taste, I think, sometimes fails."

But all this success was not obtained without paying the price in the obloquy and suspicion that every popular political character has to meet, and Benjamin suffered quite as much for the company he kept as from any indiscretions of his own. Although he was no plotter himself, his friends, Lafayette and Manuel, were deeply involved in every sort of conspiracy against the Royalists, and his supposed efforts to shield them were counted as admissions of his participation in their misdeeds. At the time of the disturbances connected with the passing of the Electoral Bill, to which reference has already been made, the Government, desiring to make trouble for some of the Liberal leaders, made a search in Constant's department of the Sarthe, and found at Goyet's office, among other

[1] From the MS. copy in French (Charlotte's handwriting?), on black-bordered paper, marked "For M. Charles de Constant." (Geneva Archives.)

BENJAMIN CONSTANT, DEPUTY

From a line drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

places, letters from Lafayette and Constant, which, it was claimed, 1820
were intended to stir up the youth of the country to revolt. The papers were seized and Goyet was arrested on the charge of having received and concealed communications from enemies of the Government. Among them was a plan for enabling the deputies of the Left to become acquainted with the laws that were to be presented to the Chamber, before the Ministry had brought them forward; a scheme which would have given the Opposition an opportunity to direct public opinion against the laws in advance, through the ordinary relations between each Deputy and the electors of his department. The plan was the work of a friend of Goyet's, a M. Sauquaire-Souligné, who, after having been, in 1816, an agent of the Royalists, was on the editorial staff of two Opposition papers, *Père Michel* and the *Renommée*. It was quite impracticable, and never had progressed much beyond paper, but its discovery gave the Government an opportunity to discredit Lafayette and Constant by making public their letters, which revealed decided hostility to the ministry of Richelieu, then in power. Goyet and his friend were arraigned before the Court of Assizes, and the trial attracted large crowds. The presence of Constant and Lafayette as witnesses for the defendants, and the public reading of their letters, made a great sensation. Lafayette, cool and haughty, took the stand and denied that the letters contained any sentiment that had not already been freely expressed in the Chamber; Benjamin formally protested against their use in mutilated form, in order to falsify the sense. He was able to prove this charge and Goyet was formally acquitted. But the plotting went on, none the less, especially in the Army, where the traditions of Bonaparte furnished a fertile soil for discontent, and notwithstanding the vigilance of the Government, insurrections continued to break out in the south throughout the years of 1820, 1821 and 1822. They were the desperate attempts of men who were struggling to preserve the fruit of the Revolution against a reactionary Government, and as Constant's friends took part in more than one of them, he came in for a not wholly unmerited share of the Ministry's persecution. All this led up to the affair of Saumur.

During the summer of 1820, there was great unrest in the Departments. Nevertheless, in August some of the Liberal deputies went bravely among their constituents, in the endeavour to influence the elections of the coming autumn; and Constant, after taking a month's vacation in the valley of Montmorency, accom-

1820 panied Lafayette on a journey among their electors in the Sarthe. Charlotte and Lafayette's son went with them. Goyet was preparing a magnificent reception for them ; it was to be a grand Liberal rally. They had been warned against the journey as involving some risk, but they persisted in proceeding. The police of Paris notified the prefect of the department of their intended visit, their movements were watched, and the military were on guard to prevent any public demonstrations in their favour. Consequently the intended escorts of young men in the villages they traversed were intercepted. Not a stroll down the streets of the towns where they halted for a change of horses, not an address on the letters they wrote, not a visit they received or paid, escaped the vigilance of the prefect's men. At Le Mans the house in which Lafayette was entertained was entered by officers who coarsely threatened him with violence, and an attempt was made to break up a banquet which was tendered the visitors by the tradesmen of the town. The following day Lafayette prudently left, but the Constants remained to enjoy the hospitality of Le Mans and the neighbouring towns, which treated them to serenades, bouquets, poems, and patriotic songs. Not until they reached Saumur, on their return journey, where they were to be the guests of a friend who was a candidate for election, was there any serious trouble. What occurred there was related by Constant in a letter to the Minister of War, the Marquis de Latour-Mauburg, which was published in October.

Saumur was the seat of a large Cavalry School, and the young bloods of this school, perhaps excited by wine drunk at dinner, started a disturbance outside a house where a banquet was being given in Benjamin's honour. A disavowal of this rowdyism was made the following day by the officers of the school, but that same night another house where he was being fêted was the object of a still more boisterous attack—this time by an armed mob, who threatened his life, and tried to break down the door and to scale the walls, with cries of "*Vive lè Roi! Death to the Liberals and to Benjamin Constant!*" The National Guard came to the rescue of the banqueters, and furnished the Liberal Deputy with an escort out of the town the next day. The episode was turned to good account by both parties for political propaganda, and Benjamin was disposed to make light of it in his private letters. On November 7, he wrote Rosalie that his trip in the Sarthe had been a veritable triumphal tour ; that the affair at Saumur was merely a trick, not to kill him, but to force him into a secret departure ;

and that his standing firm had spoiled the plot. But it was not so easily dismissed, and a year later its consequences helped to defeat him in the October elections. 1821

These disturbances and conspiracies hurt the Liberals more than they weakened the Royalists, and the new law proved a valuable weapon against them, for it enabled the Government to direct the elections for the Chamber of 1821 entirely in its own favour. They were a complete triumph for the Royalists. Benjamin wrote Charles that there was not one of Louis' old *Chambre Introuvable* who had not been returned :

"The tide is entirely in the direction of the Counter-Revolution ; I suppose we shall finish by losing in the session all that we had obtained, and that we shall go from Ultra-Terror to the other extreme. Then those who survive will have some months or years of tolerable comfort. I begin to weary of this Sisyphus labour." (November 20, 1820.)

The virulence and abusiveness which had begun in the previous sessions increased in intensity as the Liberals saw their hard-won liberties being one by one struck down, and as the Royalists felt their strength unassailable. Discussion rapidly degenerated into personal abuse. A dispute over a Royalist pamphlet laying upon the Liberals the responsibility for a plot to blow up the Tuilleries, narrowly escaped involving Benjamin in a duel with De la Bourdonnaie, one of the most fanatical of the Ultras. Another quarrel which made a scandal among the deputies was that between Constant and Lainé. In discussing a provision in connection with the Electoral Law, Constant accused the Ministers of employing different terms in the two Chambers, with the intent to mislead the representatives. "You are the only one who misleads, here !" was Lainé's angry retort. Instantly the entire Left was on its feet, demanding that the President call to order the member who had insulted a deputy. The President evaded the issue by saying he had not heard Lainé's words, and as Benjamin professed not to have heard them either, the incident was closed. An attempt to muzzle the Tribunat by a law which was practically an extension of the Censorship to the debates in the Chamber of Deputies was unmercifully branded by Benjamin as a dispoiling and strangling of the last forlorn remnant of freedom left to the nation. The angry retorts of M. Kergolay, who presented the Bill, once more nearly led to a duel. All these outbreaks were the consequence of the repressive policy of the Ministry. Now that the press was

1821 closed to the expression of the sentiments by which the hearts of men were agitated, the Tribunat was the only outlet. "It is sometimes said," says Duvergier de Hauranne, "that the liberty of the Tribunat rendered that of the press unnecessary. That is a mistake. Debates in the Tribunat lose their elevated character and degenerate into miserable details, when spirits are lowered, characters degraded, and passions exasperated."

The session of 1821, which closed on the 31st of July, was not one of which France could be proud. Only three or four very bad and partisan laws were passed, and most of the discussions had ended in mere quarrels. The autumn session opened with a reconstruction of the Ministry, and with Décazes, the old friend of the Liberals, as President of the Council. But it was too late now to conciliate the Opposition. They felt that the adverse decisions in regard to the great Bills which had been contested so hotly in 1820, left them no possible chance of making head against the Royalists, and they threw the whole weight of their resistance into the scale of "The *Charte* at any cost," and strove for the discomforture of the Ministry at every opportunity. What, in the session of 1821, had been personal animosity, now became anarchy.

On the 12th of January a new Press Law was introduced, designed to extend the laws of suppression in the interests of the Church and religion. Amid tumult that almost drowned the voice of the President, Constant's demand for an adjournment of the discussion in order to "study the law" was lost. An amendment to invest all public officials with inviolability, brought the Liberals, who had left their seats, rushing back into the Hall. They resorted to the old tactics of carrying the war into the enemies' country: the King's prerogative would be destroyed by such a law, they declared. De Serre, keeper of the Seals, offered to consult the King on this point, and it was, of course, discovered that the King had no fears for his prerogative. "Understand it well, this is the last step which remains for you to take," cried Benjamin. "You have violated the electoral system" . . . (Right: "*That is not true!*") . . . "by the present law. You are destroying the liberty of the press." (Right: "*Do you prefer Censorship?*") . . . "You are establishing that the King has an authority other than his constitutional authority." . . . (Right: "*Yes, of course; the authority he had before.*") "And you thus are casting yourselves upon an ocean which you cannot cross without fearful shipwrecks." (*Laughter on Right; loud applause on Left.*) "You have annihilated the jury." (Right: "*That is not true!*") "You are

now annihilating proof against officials. . . . The *Charte* is violated, 1822
the Ministry forgets its oath and compromises the throne." (*Protests on Right.*) "The Chamber, as M. de Serre told you yesterday, is in open usurpation." (*Violent protests.*) "I cannot be a partaker in this usurpation, and after having combated the evil purpose of this law, with all my strength, believing in my inmost heart that you have no right to make it, and that in making it you lose your constitutional character, I can take no part, even in voting against it." [1]

After De Serre, Manuel, and others had joined in the angry war of words, the question was put to vote amid increasing tumult, and the Left, refusing to vote, out of respect for the Charte, the measure was carried by an immense majority.

The following month a taunt from a Royalist deputy, who quoted from one of Benjamin's early speeches at the Salm Club, to prove that in 1798 he had been favourable to censorship, elicited, amid cries of "*Begone!*" "*Get out!*" "*Good-bye!*" an attempt to defend his position, which was greeted with laughter and jeers from the Right, and by vociferous applause from the Left. And so the disputes multiplied; and every measure brought forward by the Ministry, however harmless and reasonable, was the signal for an attack from the Left, on the ground that the whole underlying principle of the present government was wrong and a violation of the *Charte*; and every allusion to the disturbances of 1820, to the conspiracies in the south, to the execution of Louis XVI., or to the Principles of '89, produced an explosion on one side or the other. On the 11th of March, on the occasion of a petition relating to some ecclesiastical evacuations, the references which were made to the secret societies and to the student revolts at the time of the passing of the Electoral Law, were taken up by the undaunted Benjamin, and amid such clamours that the President had several times to intervene in his favour, and amid cries of "*It is alse!*" "*Lies!*" "*You talk like a factionist!*" he defended "the hope of the country, the French youth, the studious and constitutional youth" from the suspicion that it was they, instead of the Royalist *jeunesse* crying "*Vive le roi absolu!*", who had been responsible for the disturbances. "One must read this scene, not in the *Moniteur*, where it is greatly modified, but in the Royalist and Liberal papers," says Duvergier, "to get an adequate idea of the Chamber while Benjamin Constant was speaking. At every word he uttered there were invectives, apostrophes, and personal denials, to which the Left responded by other apostrophes and

[1] *Disc.* ii., 53. February 6, 1822.

1822 other denials." When, at the end of the session, the Budget remained to be voted, a very harmless and commonplace Budget, the ammunition of the Liberals was not yet exhausted, and Benjamin was ready with another shot at the Ministry. It was useless, he declared, for any one to complain of the way in which his money was spent, when his Liberties were taken away; and he proceeded to review the whole series of the Government's measures, denouncing all the laws that had been passed, and the principles that had given birth to them. He drew a frightful picture of the political state of France. Ministers who were the creatures of the ruling party; a Council of State without responsibility of independence, and from which the best men had been dropped; a police occupied solely in provoking the crime it was supposed to prevent; an itinerant clergy in addition to the regular clergy, who could not take a step without a military escort, and whose exercises led to the profanation of churches and to riots in the streets; a department of public instruction which, because it imposed distasteful ideas upon young people, put itself into hostility with them; that was the internal condition of the country. The external policy was not much better.

"Were we consulted as to the invasion of Italy? As to the deliverance or forsaking of Greece? When we venture to speak of European politics our Ministers tremble in their seats! One would think that our speeches in this Tribunat were to be censured by the foreign Governments and that our Ministers were the attorneys for the Holy Alliance, to recall us to the question." [1]

An allusion, in referring to the Spanish Revolution, to the history of the unfortunate Louis XVI., was all that was needed to kindle the whole Right into a blaze. Amid the cries of "Outrageous! Insults to the King and the Royal family! Louis XVI. was assassinated! Call the factionist to order!" he was scarcely able to reach his climax and to refuse to vote for the Budget until the country was "delivered from the Ministry, that Providence, they say, has bestowed upon France, probably as it sends destructive plagues upon people in its wrath!" When he descended from the Tribune the applauding Left asked to have the speech printed, whereupon the battle broke out again and some one accused him of trying to arouse the passions of the youth by his incendiary words. He rose in reply, but he stood some moments before he could make himself heard in the uproar, the deputies "leaping on their benches like the devil in holy water," to quote Charles de

[1] *Disc.* ii., 188 ff. March 13, 1822.

Constant ; while the Right, who had nearly all left their seats, hurled 1822
invectives and threats at him from the aisles and passages. When at length his voice was heard above the din, defying them to impeach him, some one shouted back, " You are not worth it ! " " He who said that is an insolent fellow ! " he cried. Then, dominating the tumult for a moment, he shouted, " They say that blood that we shed is visited upon us. It will be visited upon the men who wish to deprive a generous nation of its rights, and on those who want the Counter-Revolution ! . . . In a word, it will be visited upon you ! " At this the whole Right rushed out of the Chamber as one man, and the session closed amid the most inconceivable commotion.

Thus ended the first term of Constant's services to his country in the Chamber of Deputies. It had been a stormy and exhausting experience in a life never free from perturbations. If it was not undeservedly that he had won for himself the distinction of being one of the two most detested men in the Liberal party—the other being Lafayette—and if he had been guilty of exaggerating the evils which threatened France, and of painting the villainies of the Ministry and their friends too black, his excuse lay in the apathy of the people, unaccustomed to the responsibilities of self-government, whose liberties were at stake, and who could only be roused by extreme statements. Nothing short of absolute conviction that the ideals for which he incurred such obloquy were worth fighting for, could have sustained a nature like his through so many years of struggle and discouragement. And that a man of his temperament should have persisted to the end, indicates a determination and a faith that are admirable, even when we make due allowance for the gambler's love of excitement, and for the fighting spirit that he may have inherited from his Huguenot ancestors.

Meanwhile his tribulations were not confined to the Chamber of Deputies. The failure of the so-called " Berton plot " to overthrow the Bourbons unexpectedly involved him in an accusation which, although baseless, was unpleasantly embarrassing for a man who already had so many political enemies. This plot, in which General Berton was merely the instrument selected by the " League of the Knights of Liberty " to carry out the proposed Revolution, originated among the officers of that Cavalry School in Saumur whose students had vented their Royalist feelings upon Constant eighteen months before. Berton's attempted Revolution was a failure, for the Government was able to forestall the expected rising

1822 at Saumur, and he, together with the chief conspirators, was arrested and sentenced to death. But one of the accused, a surgeon named Caffé, who escaped the death penalty by suicide, was a friend of Constant, and the fact that Constant had been in Saumur the preceding year, and at Caffé's house, together with the assertion of witnesses that Berton, on the day of the rising, had mentioned the names of Lafayette, Foy, Manuel, D'Argenson and Benjamin Constant, among those who were to compose the Provisional Government after the overthrow of the Monarchy, gave a pretext to those who wanted to get rid of him by implicating him in the plot.[1] Lafayette in all probability was actually concerned in the conspiracy, and D'Argenson also, but the other members of the " Provisional Government " were quite involuntary associates in the outbreak. But it was too good a chance to settle old scores against Benjamin for the Ultras to lose it ; moreover, that unfortunate episode in Saumur, concerning which he had published a formal complaint, had acquired notoriety which was useful to his enemies. M. Mangin, the Attorney-General, who was anxious to advance himself in the favour of the Ultras, undertook to implicate him in the affair for " moral complicity," and two indignant letters of protest from Benjamin, in his most cutting, ironical style, gave Mangin excuse for an additional charge of abusive speech. The Liberals were furious, and Lafayette, who was also under the cloud of " moral complicity," tried to force an inquiry into the charges, in the Chamber of Deputies. An unsuccessful attempt was made to summon Mangin before the bar of the Chamber. Lafayette was too popular and too prominent for the Court to venture to push the charges against him, but Benjamin was tried in the Court of Assizes on the 14th of November, Lafayette and his other Liberal friends appearing in his behalf. The case was decided against him ; a libel suit he tried to bring, was dismissed ; on appeal, the decision was again adverse, and he was sentenced to pay a fine of 500 francs and to six weeks' imprisonment. The latter penalty was remitted after the appeal, possibly through the influence of Chateaubriand, who intervened at Mme. Récamier's request.[2] A subscription to

[1] Berton is said by Pontois to have collaborated on the *Minerve*.

[2] Chateaubriand says (*Mém. d'Outre-Tombe*) that after the first trial the penalty was as stated, and, after the second, it was six weeks' imprisonment and a fine of 100 francs. On February 5, Chateaubriand wrote Mme. Récamier, " I have seen the Minister of Justice. He was very well disposed toward M. Constant, and I hope we shall obtain a commutation of the sentence, that is to say, merely the fine." He gives the dates of one trial as the 6th and 13th of February 1823, and says the first was on account of the letter to

pay the fine was at once started among the Liberals of the Sarthe, 1822
but although he was grateful for the sympathy and generosity they showed, and was willing that their intention to so honour him should be made public, Benjamin declined to allow the subscription to be raised.

The trial was a pure case of political blackmail, but it was not without its amusing features, to those who could enjoy them. The Duc de Broglie relates that one of the charges brought against Benjamin in connection with his visit to Saumur, was that the lady who accompanied him was not his wife, and that this charge had provoked some of the strong language in his two letters to Mangin. It was the fashion then, as now, for the lawyer for the defence to stir up the sympathies of the jury and audience in behalf of his client, and De Broglie and Barante, who were present at the trial, and who were well acquainted with the history of Charlotte, were greatly diverted by the touching picture Benjamin's lawyer drew of his domestic bliss, so rudely slandered; "comparable only to an idyll of Gessner, or a pastoral of Florian!"

This was the first case of a deputy being arraigned at the Court of Assizes, and it made a great stir. Among the Liberals he was regarded as a martyr, and he gained an international reputation as such. In Portugal, we are told, statues were erected to him. His political admirers in Paris escorted him in triumph to the Palais de Justice, and public opinion was decidedly on his side. But to his family in Switzerland it was a disgraceful affair, and Rosalie, who had been anxious over the "growlings of the tiger" she had noticed all summer in the papers, was indignant at his persecutors. "It is horrible to see him, crippled as he is, held up in the face of all Europe as an object of abuse and calumnies, unable to defend himself, in his rôle of lamb before the world. What is he doing in this company? I always predicted this to him—not that this is any comfort!" Benjamin, of course, made light of the "annoyances," as he airily called them, but Charlotte confided in a postscript to his letter to Rosalie, that he was ill with rheumatism, and that she had suffered greatly from "his persecution, after he had filled his office of Deputy so honestly and conscientiously." The Duchesse de Broglie, who saw him soon after the trial, wrote Barante that he appeared to her to be sad and weary of life, and to take a very hopeless view of politics.

M. Mangin, and the second for a letter to M. de Carrère, Sub-Prefect of Saumur. According to the papers the trial had to be postponed until January as Benjamin was ill. Rosalie says he was not present when the sentence was given.

1822 The November elections went badly for the Liberals ; only seven of the eighty-six new members were their candidates, and Benjamin was one of the thirty-six who were not re-elected. The lack of public sympathy with the cause he represented, disturbed him more than his defeat. He wrote Barante :

" You will have seen that I was not re-elected. Others will cry *fraud*, and I agree with them that there was fraud, but there was still more cowardice. The fear for money is much more potent in this country than fear of blood, and since every one fears the ruin of his cousin, his brother, or his son-in-law, every one has a motive of humanity and relationship in voting against his conscience. Beyond this, I do not say how little I regret leaving the Chamber, because no one would believe me, and I preserve a very sad manner in order to avoid suspicion of affectation. But at heart my desire has long been to issue honourably from a path which can only lead to ruin. When you have fools behind you and tigers ahead, the position is not to be regretted. I have filled my five sessions of legislation tolerably. I would like to finish what my office of Deputy has interrupted, and for this purpose to live peaceably and in solitude for two or three years. That is what I shall do when all my lawsuits are over. Until then I will fill my mission of *accused*, as I have filled that of Deputy. . . . If you return in a few weeks you will find me either in prison or at Montmorency, where I shall spend the winter." (November 15, 1822.)

The defeat, notwithstanding, had not been without a struggle on his part, neither did he fulfil his threat to retire from political life and devote himself to his long-neglected *History of Religions*. The war with Spain offered a fresh opportunity for the Liberals to checkmate the Royalist programme by secretly aiding the Spanish Revolutionists to resist the intervention of the French Government in their new Constitutional Monarchy. At one time there was a proposition to send Constant to Spain to guide the inexperienced Cortes in its organized resistance to a re-establishment of Absolutism ; but the inability of the friends of this enterprise to raise sufficient funds to finance the expenses of his residence in Spain, prevented him from undertaking the mission. In January the Police records show him to have been in the Gironde, and under suspicion of stirring up public sentiment in preparation for the next election. The following August the Prefect of the Lower-Rhine was notified that Benjamin Constant and his wife had a passport for Baden, and that their movements in the vicinity of Strasburg must be carefully watched. The Sarthe had lost its Benjamin, but there were other discontented Departments that needed his good offices.

CHAPTER XVIII

DEPUTY FOR PARIS AND ALSACE

(1823–1830)

BENJAMIN'S reputation for bold and extreme views followed him to the end of his life. He had proved too formidable an opponent for his enemies to neglect any opportunity to harass or discredit him. Yet the inconsistency of which they constantly accused him was in reality a gradual modification and growing conservatism (often dividing him from his party), which not infrequently marks the period of life when zeal subsides and judgments moderate. His Liberalism stopped short at that point in the road where it branched off into Democracy, and under the leadership of a younger generation—Thiers, Guizot, Quinet—his party left him far behind. That is the penalty of progressive leaders—their disciples soon outstrip them, and they incur the reproach of stagnation from those to whom they have pointed the way. To be sure, Benjamin was not an aged man when he died, but he who had so exalted and flattered the spirit of the *jeunesse* in his middle age, had lacked, in his own youth, the exuberance and the illusions that glorify youth, and that help to keep men in touch with the ideals of their juniors as old age comes on. Already at sixty he was beginning to be reckoned a trifle *passé* and old-fashioned, even timid and conservative, by the very men who had been stimulated by his ideas when they passed for new and dangerous. Yet the love of leadership was strong within him, and even when he began to find himself standing alone—save when some of his old colleagues, like Lafayette and Sebastiani, still supported him—he really had no life, no interests outside the Chamber, and the excitement it brought him yielded only to that of the gambling-table, at the close of the day. His admiring young disciple Coulmann wrote of him :

" He loved this Tribune as the sacred tripod where he always recovered his spirit and his faith. He loved applause and popularity,

1823 not as a step to ambitious designs, but for itself, the sole recompense of his exertions, the sole glory of his days; but he never sacrificed his political opinions to his popularity. . . . His love of the people was sincere and true; it was not flattery, but devotion. In the salons he had learned that politeness and moderation and absence of invective which characterized him even in his most heated attacks. Irony was the only weapon he used, but none ever excelled him in that. . . ."

"The roughness of the young Liberalism adapted itself but ill to his polite and conciliatory spirit, and at Lafayette's soirées he had often to contend openly with the leaders of secret societies or with eager young men who wanted to go beyond him."

Nevertheless, he remained to the end one of the most talked of, most quoted, most celebrated and most abused leaders of his party; and in the second period of his service in the Chamber, while his methods may have modified somewhat, the ends for which he fought never changed.

While the Chamber in the first years of the Restoration had been chiefly occupied with the establishment of certain principles of parliamentary government, under the ministry of Villèle the combat centred about the tendency toward a counter-revolution and clerical supremacy. During the three years preceding the Revolution of July which dethroned Charles, the adjustment of party divisions within the Chamber was the main problem, the Ministry striving to offer measures which would unite two of the divisions of the Chamber in such a manner as to outnumber its opponents. The question of fusion became more important than the question of legislation, and in consequence the sessions degenerated into mere party tactics, and there were no such great speeches from Benjamin, or from any one else, no such great waves of enthusiasm or fury, as those that shook the Tribunat in the early days. The style of oratory which had once been so admired won scanty applause now. The Deputies gathered in little groups, talking, plotting, and paid little attention to what went on in the Tribunat. All this renders the narrative of Benjamin's second term as Deputy much less spectacular, much less picturesque, than the scenes which have been described in the last chapter.

The Liberals suffered an eclipse during 1823 and 1824, due partly to the enthusiasm for the Government aroused by the successful termination of the Spanish War. The nation beheld with indifference the forcible expulsion of the great Liberal leader Manuel for having insisted on the right of free speech in the Chamber, while the Government's boldness in dissolving the Chamber of Deputies

and in openly manipulating the elections in its own favour passed 1824
unchallenged. Among the little handful of Liberals who were elected at the *partials* in March 1824 was Benjamin, who, having succeeded in getting by the Government, was returned from the Electoral College of Paris. " Here he is, on the edge of the precipice again," wrote Charles to Rosalie ; " about to fall from greater heights than ever, it may be ! What can he accomplish in such a Minority ? A calm, eloquent, energetic argument always gets a hearing, but in spite of the maturity of his age, can one hope for sufficient presence of mind from him ? What snares will they not spread for him ? "

The first snare was not a new one. It related to the old question of his French citizenship, which the Ultras, headed by M. Dudon,[1] resurrected in order to dispose of him as they had already disposed of his colleague Manuel. " I am again struggling against people who dispute my title to be a Frenchman, after thirty years of residence," he wrote Rosalie. In the readjustment that had followed the fall of Napoleon, Geneva had ceased to be a Department of France. A new warrant of citizenship was, therefore, required, and it was imperative that the status of his elusive refugee ancestors be established conclusively. Twenty-five years before, when the same question had been raised, Constant had cited for the benefit of the patriots of the Revolution the family tradition concerning the Constant ancestor who had been concerned in a conspiracy to establish a republic in France. Dudon now turned this fact to his confusion : " Your grandfather then was not expelled for the cause of religion but for high treason ! " The almost forgotten dispute was revived gleefully by all those for whom Benjamin had been making things uncomfortable for the past ten years. When an Ultra journal had denounced him as " a Swiss, unworthy of the country where he was born and of that where he lives," and when Loyson had accused him of having a *style réfugié* and foreign, he had been silent ; but now he could no longer allow these insinuations to pass unrefuted. Rosalie was again importuned to find the missing link in the ancestral chain which would silence these challenges for ever. The indispensable forbear proved disobliging ; he " sulked for a while in Geneva, instead of going direct to Lausanne," and when the records began to indicate that it was to avoid the persecutions

[1] " He always has Dudon, like Cerberus at the gate of the Infernal regions, who will surely find some way to bite him." (Rosalie to Charles. May 26, 1824. Geneva Archives.)

1824 of the Duke of Alva that he had come to Switzerland—in short, that the Constants had left Artois when it was a Spanish, not a French Province, and that not even their having served Henry IV. could make them Frenchmen—Benjamin was obliged to abandon the Constant line, and try what titles to citizenship his maternal ancestors would furnish. In order to investigate the Chandieu family papers, he went himself to Lausanne, taking Charlotte with him.

It was many years since " the Benjamins " had been in Switzerland ; in the meantime the *bonne tante*, Mme. de Charrière de Bavois, as well as Mme. de Nassau, has passed away. Rosalie, deprived by her aunt's death (in 1817) of the pleasant home at La Chaumière, was now living in a small apartment in the rue de Bourg. During their brief stay in Lausanne, therefore, the Constants were entertained by their cousin Auguste de Constant, son of D'Hermenches, who showed himself unexpectedly cordial, even flattered, to have such a distinguished guest. Benjamin's reception in his native city was most satisfactory. Rosalie wrote Charles :

" It was necessary to stop the young people from serenading him. He refused everything that would have been sensational. We went to La Chablière ; he wanted, with the aid of his crutch, and of his wife, to walk to the lindens. The beauty of the landscape and the memories it revived, affected him deeply. As for his wife, she would have given her life to stay there."

La Chablière had been sold and was now the property of a M. de Fries, but the associations, the beauty of the spring upon the Swiss countryside, and Charlotte's enthusiasm, gave him the fancy to repurchase his old home. The project was under discussion after his return to Paris, Auguste de Constant even being commissioned to take the steps preliminary to the purchase. But it proved to be only a passing whim ; affairs in Paris were too engrossing, and as he succeeded in keeping his place in the Chamber, La Chablière was doomed to remain in the hands of strangers.

Benjamin returned to Paris in triumph, with the indisputable proofs of his French refugee descent through the Chandieu line, dating back to 942. " I hope he will leave our grandfather in peace now," wrote Rosalie. It had cost much correspondence, a long journey, several sharp disputes in the Chamber (where Sebastiani defended him with eloquence, and Dudon, Piét, Martignac and La Bourdonnaie indulged in much jesting at his expense) to make him incontestably a Frenchman. " Twenty

years of victory have not been able to legitimatize the Bourbons' 1825
throne, and thirty years of possession of the rights of a French citizen cannot justify the claims of Benjamin Constant," some one is reported to have said. But at last the commission appointed by the King to examine his claims gave a favourable report, seduced, Dudon protested, by the "golden words" of popularity with the people, while it cost his persecutor Dudon, by his own confession "a dozen liquidations."

The new Ministry formed by Villèle was disappointed in its expectation that the preponderance of Royalists in the Chamber would intimidate the Liberals. "We are twenty," said General Foy, "but we have France behind us." Some of the giants were in that little band of twenty, and they were stout of heart and spoke out boldly, while their Royalist opponents were timid and divided. If unable to defeat the Government measures—the Electoral Bill, the Bills providing for integral renewal, and for the indemnification of the *émigrés*, they could at least keep the nation excited about these curtailments of its liberties, and diminish the Royalist majority. Benjamin spoke twice on the Indemnity Bill, ostensibly discussing the methods of raising the money, but making in the end a strong case against the principle upon which it rested. "Not a word that did not tell," says Duvergier; "not a phrase that was not envenomed, and amid all this sarcasm a superb affectation of impartiality, and the offer to the *émigrés* of sincere reconciliation if they were willing to accept their indemnity in the sense of a favour, not as a conquest." And since they were talking of indemnity, he continued, and wanted to close the wounds of the Revolution (a favourite sentiment of the Royalists), why not compensate the *rentiers* too, whose wounds were still open, and who had suffered as much as any one from the Terror, and the requisitions, and from all the calamities that had fallen so much more heavily on those who had bravely remained on French soil than on those who had fled from the troubles? "They have had no indemnity, and yet not only is there no proposition to give them any, but it is proposed to make them pay the indemnity of the others." Using his favourite tactics, he artfully showed the *émigrés* guilty of having deserted their King at the critical moment. "If, instead of soliciting useless and perfidious aid on the banks of the Rhone, they had remained in France, they would have swelled the army of the faithful and saved the King." The cool effrontery of such a charge brought cries of rage from the Right. When he could again make himself heard, he

1825 went on to shatter the illusion that the indemnification could heal the breach between the *émigrés* and the rest of the nation; it would merely isolate them, he argued; they were all members of one great family, but they would now be a class apart, the indemnified class, and indemnified at the expense of all the others. Amid prolonged uproar he concluded: "I have never opposed the reasonable reparation of any misfortunes. I deny to no party, to no error, even, the possibility of generous impulses, or the excuse of irresistible necessity; but I rise up against *inequality*; I protest against exceptional reparations!" [1]

Though the Bill passed, a breach was apparent in the ranks of the Right, and the little group of Liberals saw their position greatly strengthened. Only the King and his ministers were blind to the gathering dangers. They persisted in their policy of pushing the interests of the Jesuits and the *émigrés*, and brought in next a Bill to punish sacrilege by penalties as severe as those for parricide or apostacism, which alienated many of their best men. The old questions of dispute which had divided the Left, Left Centre, and Centre, were suspended, and Doctrinaires, even some Ultras, made common ground of their discontent with the Ministry of Villèle. Moreover, there was an army of progressive young men of letters, such as Guizot, Rémusat, Merimée, Thiers, Quinet, Michelet, Carrel, who were rapidly nearing the minimum age limit for deputy, and to whom the Opposition looked for reinforcement in the future. Constant had been their leader and their idol, and they were zealously passing on his doctrines to the middle classes all over France, through their papers, the *Globe*, the *Constitutionnel*, the *Tablettes*. Through the salon of Lafayette as well as in many less famous drawing-rooms, his ideas about free government had been popularized, and even in the schools an enthusiasm for Liberalism had been planted. The general demonstrations of respect and admiration at the funeral of the great Liberal, General Foy, in November 1825, were repeated at the funeral of the intrepid Manuel, whom the Royalists had silenced and driven from the Chamber, and furnished an added impetus to the cause which these great leaders had served; and this growing reaction in favour of Liberalism was hastened by the Royalists' open encouragement of the hated Jesuits.

On the 4th of August the Chamber was prorogued amid the scandal caused by the Government's attempt to buy up or suppress the papers that opposed it, and before it reassembled, on the 22nd of

[1] *Sur la loi d'Indemnité pour les Émigrés.* February 23, 1825.

December, the old King had died, and his brother had become Charles X. Benjamin was perfectly aware of the new King's sympathy with the old regime, and of his fanatical subordination to the Jesuits, and had more than once boldly denounced in the Chamber the "secret forces" that were at work in the south, in plots and agitations which every one knew to be directed by Charles and his friends. Nevertheless he allowed himself to be persuaded of the sincerity of the new monarch who feigned a disposition to observe the Charte, and was probably honest in his belief that as King Charles he might be an improvement on "Monsieur." He was therefore observed to be among the deputies who offered their respects to the new ruler at the reception in the Tuilleries. "I never expected to see Benjamin a courtier," wrote Rosalie, "but one must be prepared for anything. I can scarcely believe that the Comte d'Artois will continue as he has begun." And as usual Rosalie proved a shrewd prophet. 1825-6

The grounds of dispute in the Chamber had now shifted from the organization and principles of party government to the laws which were to regulate the internal administration of the country, and the growing power of the Clericals was manifested in the nature of the laws proposed by the Government. Although Benjamin was not as prominent as formerly in the discussions of such Bills as those of Primogeniture, and the new laws against Sacrilege, he was always on the watch for any attempts to create a favoured class, and for every inroad upon religious or political freedom, whether aristocratic or sectarian. When, in 1826, a bookseller, Colonel Turquet by name, was arraigned at the Court of Assizes for impiety, because he had the original idea of publishing at a low price the ethical portions of the Evangelists and suppressing the miracles, Benjamin, assisted by Michael Berr, defended him in the *Globe*. The Ultra papers had cried out upon the omission of the miracles as being equivalent to a denial. The Charte, they said, had extended tolerance to all faiths, but it contained no provision for *no faith*! Benjamin replied that the Charte was the protector of liberty of opinion whether political or religious; but the courts did not uphold him in this interpretation, and Turquet was sentenced to imprisonment under the Law of Sacrilege. Likewise, at every opportunity, he came to the defence of the educational system of France, which was struggling to throw off the yoke of ecclesiasticism, and he became the mouthpiece of all those who were aggrieved by the determined exclusion of the Protestants from positions in the schools and universities of the Departments.

1826–7 The Law of Primogeniture, superseding that of the equal division of property among all the children, was the great ministerial measure of 1826. It was in direct violation of the Revolutionary principle of equality, and therefore, although it was an honoured institution in England, Benjamin attacked it as " the first cannon-shot against the institution which thirty years of tempest have bequeathed to us." The most objectionable parts of the law were finally withdrawn and the division made optional, but in protesting against it Benjamin had an opportunity to increase his popularity with his favourite *jeunesse* by forcing the Government to consider a petition against Primogeniture, presented by one hundred and fifty law students. The interest of these young men in the serious questions of politics, which the Right branded as presumptuous and disloyal, he praised as a favourable omen, and contrasted the youth of this generation with those of the preceding, who were only concerned with intrigues and frivolities.

The indifference of the Government to the cruelty of the negro traffic in the island of St. Domingo, was another subject which frequently called out bitter protests from him, and he often broke a lance with his old enemy, the Ultra Dudon, over the inhumanities which were permitted to continue there. It is not necessary to say that Dudon got the worst in these little brushes, but on the whole the struggle of the handful of Liberals was against great odds, and left Benjamin weary and disheartened. " God knows what turn affairs will take," he wrote Rosalie. " I await the future patiently and with indifference—indifferently, because at my age there is little reason to regret, whatever happens; patiently, because for the next thirty years I think it is impossible that anything good can be established in such a way that it may be enjoyed. The Chamber has obliged me to postpone my third volume."

In the spring of 1827 the Villèle Ministry was practically doomed. But the Press Bill, which had to come up once in so often for extension or retouching, was the rock on which the Government went to pieces. At the close of the session of 1826 it had been rumoured that the censorship was to be restored in full rigour, and Constant, being the acknowledged champion of Freedom of the Press, availed himself of his favourite opportunity—the discussion of the Budget—to ask a few pertinent questions in anticipation of the new Press Bill. These brought the entire Right buzzing angrily about his head. " What have you done ? " he cried to the Ministry :

"What have you done? You have got your Septennial Law 1826
to make you secure. Are you going to put in the seven years in sleep? Where is the reorganization of the jury and of the departmental and communal administration, and the Civil Code Measures you thought so important when you were simple members of the Chamber? But if you had done nothing but sleep it would have been better; if you slumbered in respect to the good things you were still wide awake for the bad. You have ruined the *rentier*, disturbed industry, divided families. Your activity is no less reprehensible than your inactivity. You could not make Haiti acknowledge your suzerainty; you were unprepared for the Spanish War, and thought Sire Ouvrard[1] was a magic power who could provision an army by turning his ring. You have done nothing to aid Spain against anarchy, and the inhumanity of your diplomacy is witnessed in the ruins of Greece, the corpses of martyrs, old men, women, children. . . . And what remedy do you propose for all this? The censorship! If it is necessary to-day, it is because you have governed badly. Either France is in danger or she is not. If she is not in danger, why the censorship? If she is in danger, it is you who have put her there. Do you talk of Religion? I defy you to find a single irreligious word in the journals. Do you speak of morals? I defy you to find in any paper a single insult to propriety. You say you judge it necessary. What guarantee have you for the rectitude of your judgment? You have been mistaken everywhere. All events have been in the inverse sense to your forecast. You do not know what you are commanding, what you are doing. . . . I cannot grant the money of the taxpayers to continue this system!"[2]

Nevertheless, the Ministry thus condemned kept its own counsel as to its intentions with regard to press legislation in the next session. The worst was realized, however, in the bill they did present the following autumn—a bill which Casimir-Périer declared unfit to be offered to any civilized assembly, and which was "the equivalent to saying that printing was to be abolished from France and moved to Belgium." It was merely a continuance of the class legislation of the previous session, and designed to protect the clericals and Jesuits against the attacks of the pamphleteers. It confined trials for press offences to certain courts which could be controlled by the Government; it extended the number of days required for the inspection of a book before it could be published; it fixed heavy responsibilities on publishers, editors and even printers, and it increased the tax on newspapers. It was nothing short

[1] Speculator and Army Contractor in the Spanish War.

[2] *Sur le Projet de Loi relatif au Budget de* 1827. May 17, 1826. (The abstract given here is from Duvergier.)

1826 of a muzzle on free speech and on opinion. All who were interested in the spread of ideas, from the Academicians to the printers and type-setters, petitioned against such a monstrous tyranny. Royer-Collard made a long, philosophical speech against the bill. Constant, who had reiterated all the arguments in favour of a free press so many times in the past that every one knew them by heart, adopted an ingenious form of presenting them anew. He announced what method he would adopt if he wanted to annihilate entirely the freedom of the press ; in this method he described minutely, clause by clause, the measure under debate. The speech, which was interrupted by violent denials from the Minister of Justice, is an epitome of all that he had been saying for twenty-three years on that subject ; and yet such was the perversity with which he was continually misquoted and misinterpreted, that he was obliged at the outset to defend himself from the charge of having at one time opposed the freedom of the press, when he was merely protesting against its intrusion into private life.

"I have defended the freedom of the press under all the Governments, for . . . all Governments are the enemies of this freedom, all are determined to destroy it. I have said that there were papers that made a business of calumny and of defamation ; that they were guilty, and that I blushed to see men assume the right to slander. That is what I said. I do not disavow it."

Yet a second and a third time he spoke in those agitated days, amid the protests of the deputies, who were weary of his hobby. Peyronnet, who presented the bill, was almost his match in wit and sarcasm, and was determined to prove him an inconstant lover of Liberty. He recalled the days of the Directoire and of the 18th Fructidor, which Constant was known to have approved at the time, when unruly writers and deputies were silenced without recourse to the laws. Then, proceeding to mimic the form of Constant's speech, Peyronnet described the methods *he* would employ if he desired to create fresh disturbances in France—the method, in short, of the Liberals. "Not daring to attack the throne openly I would attack the Religion by which the throne is supported. I would revive old quarrels ; I would find fault with everything, I would dispute everything."

It is always embarrassing to have to defend one's past against the criticisms of people who regard inflexibility of opinions as the index to inflexibility of principle ; and, in addition, Benjamin was conscious of having blundered more than once in those days of his political novitiate. Duvergier admits, in his account of this scene,

that the orator appeared confused when he rose to reply to this 1827
personal attack by Peyronnet, and without attempting to refute the charges specifically, he merely protested his lifelong devotion to Justice, Liberty and Religion. The bill went up to the Peers in a much mutilated condition, and there encountered further rough handling, which led to its withdrawal by the Government.

The defeat of the Ministry was celebrated by illuminations and processions throughout France. The following autumn Villèle resorted to the desperate measure of dissolving the Chamber. In spite of the seventy-six new peers that he created for his own support, and of a decree modifying the censorship, the Liberals were everywhere successful in the elections for the new Chamber. Lafayette was elected for Meaux, and Constant was returned from two districts. Some of the tricks which the Government had employed in order to defeat its opponents were not very creditable, and Constant revenged himself by reading in the Chamber, in spite of the Royalist protests, a circular in which all officials in a certain Department who did not vote for the Ministerial candidates had been threatened with destitution. Another method of the Ministerial party had been to render Opposition candidates ineligible by reducing their taxes. Benjamin had found his own taxes dwindling each year until they promised to soon sink below the amount a Deputy must pay.

The unpopularity of the Ministry in Paris was demonstrated by the uproarious celebrations of its defeat, which soon threatened to assume a more serious form. There was bloodshed before the disturbances were quieted, and each side accused the other of having stirred up the trouble for its own ends. The Liberals lost no time in pointing a moral, and attributed the delay in dispelling the mobs to the fact that the Government, having abolished the National Guard, had no force at hand to deal properly with the people. Constant was a member of the Liberal deputation that waited upon Villèle in order to call his attention to the slowness with which the Government had acted. Villèle received them coldly, leaning disdainfully against the chimney-piece as Constant reproached him with the sacrifice of life which had resulted. He responded bitterly that, had the Government used force at the outset, the Liberals would have laid the whole affair at his door, alluding to what had actually occurred in the disturbances of June 1820. "He has the Devil's wit," he overheard Benjamin say, as the deputation withdrew.[1]

[1] Villèle said of Constant's oratory: "I always have a shield for the orators of the Opposition, but this one knows how to find the weak place, and if he doesn't kill, he wounds cruelly."

1827 The Department of the Bas-Rhin, which Constant had now chosen to represent in preference to his old district of Paris, had made his acquaintance, politically, during the summer vacations when he and Charlotte sought the baths and waters of Baden as a cure for rheumatism. Baden was the rallying point of the Liberal leaders and of their young followers, and Benjamin was much feasted there. It is related that a certain young Royalist of Alsace, tired of hearing him toasted and eulogized at the restaurants of Baden where the Liberals congregated, finally broke up the good cheer of one of these gatherings by crying, "Allow me to propose a new toast, one that is dear to everybody, that of His Majesty the King, Charles the Tenth!" The narrator adds that Constant relished this interruption so little that he never returned to that particular restaurant.

In the salon of Mme. Davilliers in Paris, he had met a zealous young Liberal from Alsace named Coulmann, "who," wrote Charles, "is strongly attached to Benjamin, and who follows his political star." Paris and those who were the leaders in its political life thrilled and fascinated the young Alsatian students, to whom the French language, just beginning to be taught in their schools, was the symbol of freedom and progress. Coulmann was a warm admirer of the veteran deputy, and was proud to entertain him in his home at Brumath when the Constants passed that way in their trips to Baden. He persuaded Constant to aid the cause of Liberalism by representing Alsace in the Chamber.

The Bas-Rhin, owing to the general discontent and unrest prevailing there, was one of the chief centres of Liberal strength. This unrest was largely due to the clash between Protestant interests and the aggressions of the clergy, who had become very bold under the protection of Charles, and was not in any way connected with the national status of the province. Strasburg, although it had lost its political independence, enjoyed advantages of local government which were an adequate compensation. There had been no attempt to overturn traditions; German was still spoken in most of the villages of Alsace; the papers were printed in both languages, and in some of the schools both languages were taught. It was Napoleon who had said: "Let them have their German speech; they fight in French!" And just because of their loyalty, the ideals of the Revolution were doubly precious to them. The Protestants, both Lutherans and Calvinists, were very numerous, and the former had an Academy of which one of the Liberal deputies was Director; but the Calvinist synods

were under the control of the Government, and the Protestants 1827
were also chafing under the loss of the direction of their schools and colleges, and the bestowal of the official positions on Romanists.

Since its incorporation with France, the Bas-Rhin had developed greatly its industrial and agricultural resources. Large fortunes had been amassed by several families of manufacturers, who were steadily advancing in influence, and the bourgeoisie was developing a thirst for ideas and liberties. The peasants, who were largely Catholics, were peaceable and industrious, and disposed to be content with present conditions; it was among the wealthy manufacturers, the owners of saw-mills, of iron and dye works, and among the lawyers and bankers, that Liberalism found its supporters. The aristocracy sympathized with the Government, and among them were several families of the German nobility who had returned with the Bourbons from their Rhenish estates, and who still retained their relations with their German cousins. The Prefect of the Department, Esmangart by name, was attached to the Government, and furnished it with information about all the King's enemies in the provinces. He had already answered an attack upon the Ministry made by Benjamin during the discussion of the last Budget, by a denial of the assertion that the Protestants in the Departments had not been fairly treated. But, considering that the Academy, in which, he boasted, twelve out of twenty-eight professorships had been given to Protestants, had always been a Lutheran College, this, among others, would not seem to be a convincing argument for the liberality of the distribution of favours. The presence of many retired military men in the Department that had furnished some of Napoleon's marshals, kept alive the traditions of the Revolution among them, and the industrial classes, who were intelligent, prosperous and progressive, were deeply interested in politics. Through the medium of ostensible commercial travellers, who were in reality agents of the Opposition party, there was a certain amount of propaganda, although the Alsatians were not inclined to active participation in the plots that were being carried on in their midst. But the ferment was working and the Government was aware of its danger; consequently when Benjamin, whose movements always occasioned considerable uneasiness in the Police Department, was known to be in the region of Strasburg, Esmangart, the Prefect of the Bas-Rhin, was warned to keep a close watch upon him as a "dangerous incendiary."

1827 When, in the autumn, the Constants were Coulmann's guests *en route* to Baden, the local Royalist paper commented as follows :

" Every one is inquiring for what purpose Benjamin Constant is coming among us ; he has presented himself with the intention of purchasing property in our country at the precise moment when a subscription in his honour is announced, . . . hailing him as the Defender of Liberty. Follow his political career since the time of the famous Proclamation of the Duke of Brunswick, who promised not to leave one stone upon another in Paris, to put everything in France to fire and sword, at the time that she had been unfaithful to her King—until the time when this Publicist comes to swear in the inns of Alsace and of Baden that he will perish, if need be, in order to establish Liberty in a country which already enjoys it in the highest degree ! " . . .

The writer, who was none less than the Prefect himself, went on to inquire why M. Benjamin Constant did not run about the country proclaiming himself the champion of Liberty when the tyrant Bonaparte was trampling it under his feet ? " Instead, he tore up the *Charte* he now is so fond of ! "

Notwithstanding the inhospitable insinuation that Alsace was not reduced to asking a stranger to defend her rights, the Liberal young men of that region organized a demonstration in the stranger's honour. Esmangart, who certainly was an artist in description as well as in abuse, sent to the police department at Paris a vivid account of the festivities, and of Benjamin addressing the crowd of serenaders who floated in barges upon the river under his balcony at night—his tall, slender figure and picturesque flowing locks illuminated by two tall candles held aloft by some of his henchmen, while the people hailed him as the Defender of Liberty, of the Press, and of the *Charte*—" the New Canning." Not a detail escaped the vigilant Prefect, even to the appearance of Charlotte at the lighted window of the balcony beseeching her imprudent lord and master to come in out of the damp night air. After the departure of the Constants for Baden, Esmangart worked hard to sow discord in the Liberal ranks and to bring about a split. Through his letters to the police and the no less detailed reminiscences of Coulmann, it is possible for us to follow Benjamin through the celebrations held in his honour—the *musicale* at Brumath, the Sunday services at which the Protestant clergyman eulogized him as the protector of freedom of thought against the assaults of clericalism, the subscription dinner at Strasburg, and the other grand banquet at Colmar where he was sumptuously entertained

by the rich Hartmann family whose residences and factories were 1827
in that region. Esmangart vented his chagrin over all this propaganda in sneers at the grand reception which was arranged for the "new Canning" at Colmar, which was "headed by a watchmaker" with a local celebrity for inebriety, who had not seen fit to redeem his reputation on this occasion. At Munster, where there were more Hartmanns, cannon and music hailed the Chief, and a visit was paid to the magnificent château of the Comte de Thiars, where there was a reunion of the Liberals—Chauvelin, Daunou and others—and where a brilliant dinner was tendered them. A short visit to Constant's half-sister at Dôle, where he was reported to have been very quiet and exciting no attention, a conference with Lafayette at his Maison de la Grange, outside of Paris, completed this successful little "swing around the circle." It was "roses, roses all the way"—young girls in white presenting crowns of laurel and garlands and bouquets; Bengal fires, escorts of *jeunesse* on horseback, cries of "Vive Benjamin Constant," and bands of music playing the popular Liberal rally-song, "Où peut-on être mieux qu'en sein de sa famille?" Of course there were several budding local poets to render original verses in his praise; and Coulmann relates with profound admiration how, when the people crowded into the courtyard at Brumath to have a glimpse of the great man, and among them a number of dirty little children who "did not distil the odours of Araby," Constant rebuked an attempt to put the unsavoury little future electors at a distance. "Let them come," he said benignantly. "A Roman emperor said that the body of a dead enemy never smelled bad. I think that the bodies of my living friends always smell good!"

It must be admitted that Benjamin dearly loved the rôle of the people's idol, and that this sort of adulation gave him immeasurable satisfaction. He had to take so much abuse during his political life that the harmless enjoyment of these little triumphs cannot be begrudged to his old age, and he may be pardoned for the pleasure he expressed at finding "friends in huts and in palaces alike," and at hearing from the lips of a blacksmith in a lonely forest, in whose forge he had taken refuge from a tempest, the cry of "Von Gott gesandt!" when he was recognized.

"I will not try to recount to you my reception since entering the Department of Haut-Rhin," he wrote Coulmann. "I met M. Fred. Hartmann and afterwards his two brothers, and the whole family overwhelmed me with such kindness that I cannot paint to

1827–8 you the life I lead or what I feel. I cannot recall anything like it in all my experience. . . . M. Stoeber will tell you of the magnificent fête on the Schloss-Wald. . . . I defy a sovereign to receive anything like it, even on command, and by requisitioning all the salaries of his kingdom.

" Paris will seem very dull, very barren, very unfriendly, after Alsace. I do not know how I shall be able to resume the respiration of that atmosphere, so different from Brumath and Münster. I owe it all to you, for without you I would not have been at Baden, I would not have passed through Bischweiler, I would not have come to Alsace. Brumath and Münster are to me two Paradises ! "

Charlotte, too, had enjoyed the experience, and joined to his her regret at leaving what she called " Germany," " which is," Benjamin explained, " a very great compliment from her. You and I claim Alsace for France, and truly, if Alsace has the German solidity, it also has the French energy."

In spite of the intrigues of Esmangart, Constant was elected Deputy for Alsace, and he continued to represent that Department until his death, under the ministries of Martignac and of the hated Polignac, and through the Revolution which brought the Duc d'Orléans to the throne. He had now reached the zenith of his fame as a publicist, if indeed we may venture to ascribe to him fame, in the face of his detractors' assertions that popularity is all that can be claimed for him. His reputation was international, for not only in Spain and Portugal and in Italy, as we have seen, was he much read and admired, but he was also celebrated on the other side of the Atlantic. Stendhal relates a meeting with an American at the Opera who was burning to see and hear Constant in the Chamber, and who was disposed to boycott the Academy for excluding from its membership Béranger and Benjamin Constant, with whom, he said, Americans were well acquainted. Sainte-Beuve says that Lanfrey was astonished and ashamed that France proved so indifferent to the teachings of his " glowing mind," so rational, so clear and limpid in its presentation of truths.

His daring and independent position on political questions was partly responsible for his failure to secure the coveted admission to the Academy. Certainly his earliest literary efforts, *Wallstein* and the *History of Religions*, were undertaken with that reward distinctly in view. On more than one occasion he solicited Chateaubriand's influence with the Academy in his favour, but he was doomed to see his inferiors in intellect and in wit advance where he could not follow. In spite of all the little triumphs that he had

secured, his life shows on the whole more disappointments and 1828
checks than actual honours, and the crowning grievance came at the very end when, for a second time, in spite of the efforts of his friends, his name was rejected in the elections of the Academy, in favour of a much less celebrated and soon forgotten competitor, Viennet. There was great indignation in the circles he frequented over what Ballanche called " the ignoble severity " of the Academicians in this exclusion. Sismondi declared that Constant was superior in intellect and in literary merits to any of those who sat in judgment on his eligibility. Unquestionably there was something of the spectacular and sensational in his career as well as in his manner and in his principles, which was incompatible with the " grave and dignified traditions " of the Academy—a lack of " consideration " in the public mind, Sainte-Beuve pronounced it, that helped to defeat him. Royer-Collard says that the irregularities of his private life weighed against him ; Pontmartin implies the same ; the Academicians, he says, when reproached for having preferred an obscure man like Viennet, replied, " We chose for a well-ordered and dignified life ; we do not like people to come from Frascati's and go to sleep at our séances." But this is not the first instance where real genius and ability has been rebuffed by literary and artistic oligarchies. It is said that when the news of his rejection was brought to him, almost upon his death-bed, he turned his face to the wall and could not be comforted. As he lay dying, not many days after, he was heard to murmur, " After twelve years of popularity justly acquired, justly deserved ! "

Among the younger generation of public men this prejudice was less pronounced than with the stereotyped Academic mind ; indeed, among the young students and writers his vogue had at one time been immense, and the irregularities and mistakes, that had offended the sedate Academicians, appealed to them as picturesque and romantic. His professions of beholding in them the teachers and leaders of the older generation flattered the arrogance of youth, while they in their turn looked to him as the sympathetic representative and interpreter of their aspirations in the Chamber. But even with them, as with his own party, his influence waned at the last. In the determined fight that the Left put up against every measure proposed by the well-intentioned but weak Minister, Martignac, Constant was among the very few Liberals who perceived that the attempt to obstruct the Ministry in its efforts at fusion was bound to bring another Revolution upon France. He stated this plainly when he wrote to Béranger :

1828 "I firmly believe that for some time France can keep her freedom only by consolidating on the present basis the measure of Liberalism which she possesses or should possess. I may be wrong, but my conviction is that we should hold to the Constitutional Monarchy. I know, or believe that I know, that the old governments are more favourable to liberty than the new. If the dynasty declares itself hostile, let come what may, it is not my mission to save those who want to perish. . . . But all desire for an overturning, without other motives than memories or hatreds, will never enter into my mind." (January 29, 1829.)

This just and impartial view was not one that men understood or welcomed in those times when memories and hatreds were still so fresh, and was at once Constant's greatest quality and his real obstacle to success with his contemporaries. Thus he was frequently at variance with his party, who were quick to take up the taunt of insincerity and changeableness which his enemies had always delighted in. Although he continued to write for the *Courrier Français*, with which he and his friend Pagès had been connected since 1822, he was out of tune with the increasing boldness and absoluteness of language used in this paper after it came under the direction of Mignet, Kératry, Rabbé and the Abbé de Pradt. From the younger coterie who had started the *Globe*—Thiers, Rémusat and Sainte-Beuve—the divergence was still wider. In those Liberal drawing-rooms where he had once been hailed as the oracle, as the daring and progressive leader, where his tall, languid, stooping form, his finely-cut features and mocking mouth, framed in a halo of flowing blond curls, had formed the centre of admiring circles, he now was often observed, we are told, standing apart, silent and alone, "with the air of a faded dandy of olden days," as out of date as the faint perfume of musk that he exhaled.

It was upon his own pet principle of the liberty of the press, of which he had long been the acknowledged defender, that this misunderstanding with his own party was especially noticeable. In the hope of conciliating the Opposition, Martignac had prepared a new Press Bill, drawn up by the moderate De Broglie, and presented by Portalis, which plainly removed some of the objectionable features of earlier bills, and contained provisions that were intended to make it acceptable to both sides. But while its abolition of the Government's power to impose the censorship at will displeased the Ultras, its failure to restore trial by jury for press offences, and its extension of the exaction of guarantees to the non-political periodicals, disappointed the Liberals. To their surprise, Constant at first defended the bill and wrote a letter to the *Courrier* to that

effect. This raised an outcry from all the Liberal papers, which 1828
were determined to see in Martignac's proposed bill nothing short of "another Bastille on which the word 'Liberty' is inscribed." Both sides attacked the bill furiously, and when, after proposing an amendment which was not accepted, Constant suddenly ranged himself with its opponents, his change was attributed to fear of losing his popularity with the young Liberals. Some thought he betrayed great embarrassment when attempting to explain his conversion, but his words savour rather of his characteristic cynical humour: "I have rarely had the good fortune to be in harmony with those who hold the power," he said, "and I easily allowed myself to be led away by the seductions of a new position." Moreover, he added, he at first desired to show his confidence in the new Ministry, which touched and interested him by the feebleness and uncertainty of its steps; his expectations, however, had been disappointed, and after the Ministry, who had always made a botch of every censorship bill they had undertaken, had amended and changed the measure, there was not much good left in it. "If they wish to take men's rights from them they must not do it by halves. What they leave serves, thank heaven, to recover what they have taken. The free hand looses the fetters of the other." Martignac, who followed him with a fine speech in defence of the bill, was a match for Constant's wit, alluding to the "honourable Deputy who, obeying only the impulse of his conscience, of his personal convictions, had appointed himself its defender and pleaded its cause with the skill of which he has given so many proofs (laughter), but is now among those who have made themselves notorious for the wit, the intensity, and the bitter irony of their attacks upon it." Both the Ministry and Benjamin's friends were embittered by his changes of attitude, and to divert the emotions he had excited against himself he artfully raised the question of confidence in the intentions and attitude of a Ministry which had not yet publicly denounced its predecessor, that of Villèle, as the greatest enemy of the country. Thus it was that the impeachment of Villèle for election frauds and for violation of the *Charte* was attempted, in order to force Martignac into open endorsement of one or the other party; an impeachment for which, according to Villèle himself, only Constant and Delatot voted in the end. Constant's act, which of course frustrated all Martignac's efforts at fusion and hastened his downfall, were assuredly not prompted by mere caprice or desire for *éclat*. The fruitlessness of all well-meant efforts at conciliation, with a monarch like Charles on the throne, was clearly

1829–30 demonstrated, and he must have concluded that, if the Government was doomed, the sooner it fell the better for the nation. Charles's revenge was the Polignac Ministry, which was so violently counter-revolutionary in its composition that the young Liberal Thiers, when he read the names of its members in the papers, abandoned a trip around the world, upon which he was on the point of starting, in order to take part in the *débacle* which he foresaw.

The career of the new Ministry was inaugurated by the King's threat, at the formal opening of the Chamber on March 2, that those who opposed him were to be overcome. "Should wicked intriguers put obstacles across the path of my government . . . I shall find strength to surmount them," he announced. The Left at once appointed a committee to draw up a reply to the King's address, Constant being given a place upon it. He persisted in his efforts to give to the reply a moderate tone, while keeping the independence of attitude which would force Charles to dismiss his Ministers. The King retaliated by proroguing the Chambers on the 18th of March until the following September. The deputies were stupefied by the swiftness of the *dénouement*. "Benjamin sees no one," wrote Charles to Rosalie, four days later. "He has closed his doors to every one in order to labour unremittingly on the completion of his fourth volume [on Religions]." Sismondi reported him as crushed and stunned by the crisis. In April he started for Baden, ill and about to undergo an operation of a serious nature. On the 7th of May came the news that Parliament was dissolved. The first of June, just before the new elections, he wrote to his friend and physician, Dr. Véron, that his constituents in Strasburg had begged him to write nothing for the papers lest a misinterpretation or misquotation should favour the machinations of his enemies, and especially of Esmangart, against him in the elections. The Liberals were returned in large numbers in spite of the open attempts of the King's friends to exclude them by fraud. Constant was re-elected, but was too ill to return to Paris for the opening of the Chamber in those tense days of July, when, to quote Chateaubriand, "the Government threw itself from the top of the towers of Nôtre-Dame." On the 25th of July the *Moniteur* published the famous decrees with which the obsessed monarch tried to "surmount the obstacles" in his path. They re-established the censorship, changed the electoral law, dissolved the Chamber which had never met, and fixed 28th August for the convening of the new Parliament. Two days later the King returned to St.

Cloud from a pleasant day of stag-hunting at Rambouillet, to find 1830
the Revolution in full swing, and the guns thundering in the streets of Paris.

To Constant, just convalescing from his operation, Lafayette wrote: "A game is being played here in which our heads are all at stake. Bring yours!" And Benjamin carried his with all possible dispatch, in defiance of protesting physicians. As he passed Mont Rouge, he was compelled to descend from his carriage, and for a second time in his life his progress was impeded by the barricades that the Revolutionists had placed in the streets of Paris. He cried aghast, to Charlotte who was beside him, "Let us depart at once for Switzerland; we will go and hide ourselves in some chink in the mountains where the papers will not reach us!" But he did go on, and one of the sensations of the eventful 30th of July was the spectacle of the veteran Liberal publicist, borne on a litter in the procession that followed the Duc d'Orléans to the Hôtel de Ville, where Lafayette waited to confer upon the King's cousin the title of Lieutenant-General of France.

The days which followed were a severe experience for a sick man, and no doubt hastened Benjamin's approaching end. As many of the scattered deputies as it was possible to assemble met at the house of the banker Lafitte. There it was that the King's envoys, much delayed and through great obstacles, brought the new decrees which Charles, too late, had been frightened into offering—decrees which replaced the obnoxious Polignac by Montmartre, and which convened the Chamber for August 3. When Royer-Collard, the President of the Chamber, declined to take the responsibility of entertaining the envoys, Constant insisted that they should listen to the reading of the decrees; and when, after hearing them, the deputies were at a loss how to respond, and wanted to await a report from the Peers, Benjamin showed no relenting in this critical time, but made this "terrible reply," as Chateaubriand termed it: "We know beforehand what the Chamber of Peers will say to us. It will accept purely and simply the revocation of the decrees. As for me, I will not express myself positively on the question of dynasty; I will only say that it would be too convenient for a King to have his people fired upon and to get himself excused for it afterwards by saying, 'It is nothing, really!'" He added that, in his estimation, the re-organization of the National Guard was more important than the dismissal of the Ministers.

There was no longer a question of considering Charles' new

1830 decrees when the report came back that the Peers concurred in the invitation to the Duc d'Orléans to become Lieutenant-General of the kingdom; and Constant was among those appointed to draw up an address to the Duke. This address, which still exists in his handwriting,[1] expressed the hope that the new Lieutenant-General would preserve the national Tricolour, and assured the full and entire execution of the *Charte*. After a committee, chosen by lot, had been sent to present the address, Constant, with Guizot, Bérard and Villemain, was delegated to the still more delicate task of preparing a proclamation to the people wherein the deputies should explain to the nation their reasons for dethroning Charles. The proclamation, which began with the Liberal motto, "He will respect our rights, for he will derive his own from us," continued with an enumeration of the guarantees of their liberties which the Duke would furnish by the restoration of their beloved *Charte*, and ended with the famous phrase, "The *Charte* will be a reality." This proclamation, of which Constant is stated by Duvergier to have been the principal composer, was criticized by some as being too timid, but was received by most of the deputies with great enthusiasm.

On the 7th of August two hundred and nineteen deputies offered the crown with the title of "Louis Philippe, roi des Français," to the Lieutenant-General. The new King was not insensible to the services of the leading Liberals, and in his Council of State, Constant was made President (de Broglie would have us believe by his suggestion) of the most important division, that to which was deputed the formulation of the new laws of administration. His period of office lasted only fifty-one days, and, if we are to believe de Broglie, he did not prove a zealous attendant of the sessions of the Council, but his failing health was sufficient reason for his absence. In the discussions of the Chamber, on the other hand, he still was able to take some part, and soon showed himself in opposition to the new Ministry, particularly in relation to the press laws. This independence is noteworthy, because Benjamin's enemies made much of a gift of 200,000 francs which he received from Louis Philippe shortly after the Revolution, and which they were eager to interpret as a bribe. It appears, however, that Constant owed precisely that sum of money to Lafitte, the banker, who needed to call it in; and, in order that he might enter upon his new duties as

[1] Glachant; who says that the following day a new one was drawn up by Guizot. Pasquier (vol. vi. p. 103), who gives the text, says it was drawn up by Guizot, Villemain and Bérard.

Councillor of State with dignity and freedom, the King offered to 1830
defray the debt "in the name of Liberty." Loménie declares, moreover, that in accepting, Benjamin retained his entire independence, saying, "Sire, I accept, but Liberty takes precedence of gratitude. I wish to remain independent, and if your government makes mistakes, I shall be the first to stir up opposition." To which the King replied, "That is precisely what I mean also!"

The King seems not to have filled his part of the compact loyally, for de Broglie relates that Louis Philippe one day handed him two papers he had just received from Constant, one a plan for the reform of the Council, making it into a permanent tribunal with public sittings, and the other a private letter informing the King of his intention to propose this transformation, provided he received no sign from him to the contrary. The King, says de Broglie, was deeply hurt, and gave him both documents to return to their author, without a word of comment, but did not dismiss him. It may have been after this rebuke that Benjamin wrote Rosalie, "Things are getting complicated, and perhaps before long I shall be only a deputy, but, nevertheless, I think the King the best citizen in his kingdom."

The impeachment of the Polignac Ministry, as having been responsible for the unconstitutional acts of Charles, was one of the measures brought forward by Constant and his friends, but this gave the Royalists a chance to stir up the people on their own side, and, on the 17th of October, when the King returned from a grand review of the National Guard at Versailles, he found his palace besieged by an angry mob, who gathered the following day in still greater force at the Palais Royal. In consequence of this, Louis Philippe's ministry resigned, and Constant's official relations with the King terminated.

On the 19th of November a proposition which he submitted in the Chamber with regard to the regulation of printing and bookselling was rejected in every article by an overwhelming vote and amid "loud laughter." His rejection as a candidate for the Academy being fresh in his heart, there seems no doubt that the chagrin of this last repulse was the final blow to his failing strength. It was his last speech from the Tribune. He was not permitted to see the end of these "rather interesting things," which, he wrote Barante, he would "like to follow a little further."

CHAPTER XIX

AUTHOR AND PUBLICIST

"I WOULD like to have finished at least two works, one political and one religious, before my mind decays, in order to leave some trace behind me," wrote Constant in his Journal, while life was still before him. To-day he is valued in all countries by historians and students of constitutional law for several important treatises, notably *Cours de Politique*, upon that subject. In France he is also remembered as the author of *Adolphe*. The *History of Religions*, on which he laboured intermittently for forty years, failed to secure his election to the Academy, and as it dealt with a subject in which modern scholarship has made great strides since his time, it was soon out of date and forgotten. Of the many books begun or projected before he met Madame de Staël, the *History of Religions* was the only one ever completed, for the work which was most needed when he finally broke away from his uncongenial duties at the Court of Brunswick, was not of the kind that can be produced in the calm and solitude of a scholar's library, and when once he was caught in the whirlpool of active political life there was no turning back.

Moreover, he was not adapted either by temperament or by mentality for a *tour-de-force* which brings fame quickly. When Rosalie reproached him for his delay in completing the biographies of his uncle, his grandfather and Mme. de Charrière, which he had undertaken to write for a dictionary of biographies, he replied that one of the "numerous defects" of his mind was his inability to confine himself within an object, but to begin rather by surveying it first from one side and then from the other, before tracing out its route and its limitations. "It is but a slight inconvenience when it is a question of an extensive work, because it occurs but once, but the very shortest article constrains me to a labour almost as long, before I can reach the point of ridding myself of a host of useless ideas." In spite of his inimitable letters, composition was never as easy for him as speaking, and he was wont to correct

his manuscript again and again. Mackintosh has described with some contempt Benjamin's method of writing "on pieces of paper, tied together with a string," which he sorted and grouped, changing their order as he altered the arrangement of his topics. The Scotchman thought this a clumsy and unscholarly method of composition, but Benjamin was only anticipating a filing device used universally in modern research work.

The luminous and concise style for which he became celebrated is not fully formed in his early work. He had difficulty in freeing himself from a certain awkwardness and pedantry in formal composition, due in part, no doubt, to his study of the German and the Scotch philosophers. Some of Mme. de Staël's mannerisms, too, crept into his first political essays in which she collaborated. But he gradually discarded these defects, and in *De l'Esprit de Conquête* he has arrived at that simplicity and directness, that delicate flexibility and crystal clearness, that lends such charm and distinction to his style, even when he is treating the dullest subjects. "Not in Voltaire himself," says Faguet, "do we find greater clearness, conciseness, sincerity, than in *L'Entretien d'un Électeur avec Lui-même*. He remains the most luminous, if not the most vigorous, thinker of our age." In the opinion of Sismondi, although falling far below what, with his extraordinary gifts, he should have attained, Constant still reached a point far in advance of his contemporaries. "He seems to me far superior to the Academy who pronounced against him." As was to be expected from so sensitive a spirit, his style is wholly objective; there is no hint of inner conflicts or vacillations, no warmth or emotion (save possibly in some passages concerning death in the *History of Religions*), nor did he permit the badinage and witticisms with which his conversation sparkled to creep into his writing. Irony he used freely, yet not in such a way as to mar the courtesy and moderation of tone which characterize the man of culture and breeding. His extensive acquaintance with languages and literatures gave colour and variety to his style and supplied him with a wealth of illustration and allusion, but also at times betrayed him into the mixed metaphors and foreign idioms of which he has been accused.

Out of a dozen people to-day to whom you may speak of Benjamin Constant, three will confuse him with the painter whose works are in the Luxembourg;[1] three perhaps, if they are students, will ask if he did not write something important about constitutional

[1] Rudler calls attention to the frontispiece of the Dent edition of *Adolphe* (1908) as being, presumably, a portrait of the *painter*, Benjamin Constant.

government ; the others will exclaim, " The author of *Adolphe* ! " It is part of the irony that tinged all the events of his life that, after nearly a century has passed, he should be best known by a book which depicts his greatest weakness, and upon which he set the least value.

In 1809 Constant wrote Barante from Lyons :

" Have you read the letters of Mlle. de Lespinasse ? I am, while reading them, like the audience of *Judith* ; I am crying, Alas for the poor Holofernes ! that is to say, for M. de Guibert. But it is a book that holds you, as a description of a malady of the heart. It is, in a way, my novel turned about."

Benjamin's novel *Adolphe*,[1] written in two weeks, in the height of his struggle to free himself from Mme. de Staël, and so short that it can be read in an evening, is the story of that struggle and the deception of his own heart, narrated with a simplicity and intensity that make it a masterpiece in the analysis of passion. It has appeared in about forty editions. It has been translated into German, English and Spanish. Although more than a century has passed since it was written, it is still to be found on bookstalls throughout France, and the new editions which appear every now and then are prefaced by appreciations from such distinguished critics as M. Paul Bourget and M. Anatole France.[2]

This romance was not intended for publication. Benjamin first read it at gatherings of some of his intimate friends, who " divined the meaning very well." " What I have written is not an imaginary work ; *non ignova mali*," he wrote in his Journal. But he was dismayed to find that some of them—Fauriel and Mme. Récamier among others—were " revolted by the hero's character," and thus had not really divined *his* meaning at all. After his marriage, becoming bolder, he read it to larger audiences. " You ought to see him read it," wrote Barante ; " his heartrending emotion, bathed in tears and interrupted by sobs ! " The Duc de Broglie, who heard him read it " ten or fifteen times," relates that, under the spell of his emotion, the whole company wept with him, and afterwards burst into hysterical laughter. We have already described the state to which his English listeners were reduced in those vanished days of " sensibility." We control our feelings better to-day. No one now sheds tears over *Adolphe*, but certain of the elect can still spend a few hours of utter absorption with this pale, sad, monotonous little *recitative*—" delicate pastel in the key of

[1] *Adolphe : Anecdote trouvée dans les papiers d'un Inconnu.* London edition, 1816 ; first Paris edition, 1817.

[2] A new English edition has recently appeared with a preface by M. Rudler.

grey," as Sainte-Beuve, who wrote one of its prefaces, has described it. "It is the book of those who re-read," says Faguet; and Bourget, who claims to have done so for the hundredth time, calls it distinctly modern in its simplicity and lucidity. It may be considered the prototype of the analytical romance, and as such is responsible for some very dreary novels, for it requires a master hand to do this sort of thing well. The method, that of pure narrative, unrelieved by action, dialogue, localization or variety of characters, is not the fashion to-day, yet it is the very absence of these accessories which produces its most vivid effects. There are practically only two characters—the narrator and his victim, or tormentor, as we choose to view her—Ellénore. It is the bald, unadorned recital of the slow death of a passion under the torture of self-analysis, and of the hero's vacillations between disgust and pity after his love is dead. For Adolphe as for Ellénore, there is but one emotion, one interest, one purpose in life—and that is love; there is but one life, and that is the life of the senses and of the passions. It is the theme of D'Annunzio, without his seductive charm of poetical setting. In its relentless analysis of the elements of passion, it anticipates Stendhal, but misses his subtlety of suggestion. It is perfectly negative; "Death and decay," says Brandes, "and the nature of the corpse after death." Beside this novel of disenchantment, Werther and Obermann are novices.

When at last, nearly ten years after it was written, Constant, from vanity or from need of money, finally decided to publish it, and the first edition appeared in England in the summer of 1816, Rosalie wrote to Charles, "*Adolphe* has given me actual pain. It has made me suffer over again something of what I suffered over the real event." Rosalie had seen what he was trying to show—the generosity that underlay the weakness—but she "could not help wishing that he had not published it." Charles responded to her that he had always liked Benjamin and been proud of him until he "dragged our name in the dust and sold his private affairs for money." Scarcely was the book in circulation before Benjamin himself began to repent of his rashness. All the world was reading it; every one was busy identifying Ellénore; and despite the pains he had taken to disguise her—"depriving her of all *esprit* and representing her as all love and nothing else"—the name of Mme. de Staël was whispered about in connection with it. "I was urged to print this novel," he wrote Mme. Récamier; "now I am sorry I did. I never see the inconveniences of things until after I have done them. I am afraid that a certain person will be hurt by it."

Sismondi, who had been Benjamin's confidant during the period of his attempt to break with Mme. de Staël, and who had been seeking to get hold of *Adolphe* and read it aloud "in his Anglo-Genevese circle," wrote to the Countess of Albany :

"No personal portrait ever presented a more faithful likeness. It makes all her faults clear, but it does not excuse them and will not shield them. It is very probable that the author was once in love, as he represents himself to be in the book; but ever since I have known him he is exactly like Adolphe, just as little in love, just as headstrong, as bitter, and just as open to flattery, and then as ready to deceive her whose heart he had broken. He evidently wanted to remove all resemblance from the portrait of Ellénore, but by her intensity and by her demands upon his love, one could not fail to recognize her. Their apparent intimacy and her passionate tyranny, during which they both wound each other with every injury that rage and hatred could devise, is the history of them, each and both."

But the gossips finally settled on Mme. Lindsay as the original Ellénore, and Mme. de Staël's friends kept the secret so well that it was not until the publication of Sismondi's letters in 1857 that the truth was generally known.

One asks naturally how Mme. de Staël felt about all this, and whether she recognized herself as Ellénore. If she did so, she dissembled cleverly. Her biographer, Lady Blennerhasset, says that after having read *Adolphe* in manuscript she wrote Bonstetten, "Benjamin Constant has taken it into his head to write a novel, and it is certainly the most original and touching I have ever read." According to Sainte-Beuve, she did not care for the book, and refused to believe that all men were like Adolphe ; but conceited men were like him, she added. After its publication Albertine wrote Benjamin, "I felt out of temper when I read it, but perhaps those who are not your friends will not feel so" ; and she likened him to Lord Byron, in his perverse manner "of showing his character in a wrong light." This was the general verdict of his friends—that he was maligning his own character ; and then as always, the public took him at his word.

Benjamin was never proud of having written *Adolphe*. As a revelation of his personal experience, he preferred to forget it, since his purpose in writing it had been only to "get it out of his system," as it were. As a work of art he considered it negligible. In his opinion his tragedy, *Wallstein*, was of much greater importance.

Mme. de Staël, who had launched Constant on his political

career, also encouraged him to literary pursuits in the intervals when they were both banished from active participation in public affairs, but she never permitted him the repose and solitude which he found indispensable to productiveness. She wrote her own books in her drawing-room, surrounded by her guests, and participating in the conversation while she scribbled her inexhaustible improvisations upon a portfolio held on her lap. Benjamin could accomplish nothing under such conditions. Except the political pamphlets which he wrote with her or at her suggestion, the only direct literary product of their association was *Wallstein*,[1] and Mme. de Staël seems to have prompted his writing this tragedy in order to keep him quiet and happy during one of his periods of captivity at Coppet. Although she gave him the benefit of her criticism and appreciation, this drama owes much more to his visit to Weimar, and to the enthusiasm for German literature which he brought back with him. The difference between French and German rules of dramatic composition were much discussed at Coppet after Schlegel's arrival, and *Wallstein* was an attempt to reconcile these differences, while retaining what was best in both schools. On September 9, 1807, Benjamin wrote to his aunt that he had begun a tragedy on a subject taken from the German: "I have already written one act, and never have I been so well satisfied with anything I have done. It is a labour which fills both the head and the heart, and which relieves me from all the ennui of actual existence." At first he worked under intense pressure—"like a madman"—he wrote Rosalie, turning off two or three thousand lines a day. To compress Schiller's three long plays into one was a difficult task at best, and Constant lacked the poetic imagination and delicate sense of rhythm essential for successful poetry. Yet the play, which was finished in October and read to the guests at Coppet, succeeded in drawing appreciative tears—always the touchstone of literary success in those days—from the audience. Nothing came, however, of the talk of staging it there, and after Mme. de Staël's departure for Vienna and the breaking up of the party at Coppet he lost interest and felt it had too many faults to justify its completion. Especially was he discouraged by Talma's indifference to it, when it was read at Mme. Récamier's the following February. Talma saw only his own rôle, and was dissatisfied with it. Mme. de Staël,

[1] *Wallstein: Tragédie en 5 actes, et en vers: précedée de quelques réflexions sur le théâtre allemand et suivie de notes historiques.* Paschoud; Paris et Genève, 1809.

however, continued to believe that even if not adapted for the stage, it was worthy of publication, and wrote Mme. Récamier :

"I wish you would encourage Benjamin to have his play *Wallstein* printed. It should be judged by all Europe before being staged. Talma will give one criticism, some one else another, and the play will disappear. A preface by him at the beginning of the tragedy will stabilize opinion, and if there are some changes to be made after the printing, they can be made as well for the stage as from the manuscript. I beg you, dear friend, encourage him in this kind of thing. He has great literary talent, and his imagination stands in the way of his success in this sort of thing as in everything else. He cannot, with his temperament, argue with managers, actors, etc. To print and let it go its way, is, I think, the best way for everybody, for him above all."

In the spring he began to revise and shorten the play, and to give more variety to his monotonous Alexandrian verses. In deference to Talma he gave more prominence to the rôle of Wallenstein, who, in the process of condensation, had been almost forgotten in the last act. Also, abandoning the idea of adapting it to the stage, he decided to present it as a literary experiment with a preface which should be a comparison of the German and French dramatic ideals. This preface proved to be of great value as a critical introduction of the German drama to the French, and in this guise *Wallstein*, which appeared in the following winter, met with considerable success and the first edition was speedily exhausted. To Rosalie he wrote that he was beginning to think that even in Paris his undertaking had surmounted the obstacles which had retarded its success. Nevertheless, as an attempt to introduce German poetical ideals into the French classical drama, *Wallstein* must be regarded as a failure. The plot is so confused and clogged with a mass of details, characters and episodes—the result of the condensation of Schiller's three plays into one—that the beauties of the German drama are sacrificed, and the simplicity and clearness of the French dramatic form are equally lost. Constant's discussion of dramatic form in the preface would have been much more telling without the play. For the discussion went much deeper than the vexed question of dramatic unities, which was all that the general readers, including Napoleon (who criticized Constant's "Tragedy and Treatise of Poetics" to Roederer on this ground), comprehended. The difference in the aims of the two schools lay back of the mere conventions, and most of the critics completely neglected these main points of his preface. "The French characters address the audience and aim at naturalness;

the German characters address each other and aim at truth," he says. In his Journal he puts it even better: "The French and English say,' See how I describe things!' the Germans say: 'See how the object affects me!' . . . French poetry always has the moral end in view. To the German it is beauty, vagueness and emotion." [1]

Only once again, apparently, did Constant attempt a long composition in verse, and then he discreetly abstained from publication. It remained for M. Waille, director of the library at Poligny where the forgotten manuscript of *Le Siège de Soissons* [2] (which was part of Benjamin's half-brother's share of his papers) had found its way, to disinter it and publish it in 1892, adding to it a Key to the Dramatis Personæ. It is very probable that this epic, an anti-Napoleonic Satire in the form of a romance of chivalry, was the "poem" on which he set to work in bitterness of spirit on the day when he learned of the execution of Labédoyère. Napoleon is easily recognizable in the character of Argaléon, the cruel adventurer, the "frightful prodigy and bloody meteor, whom, even in detesting, men admire none the less."

"Vainqueur des Apennines soumis,
Il comble sous son poids les Alpes étonnées,
Et de ses faibles ennemis
Disperse d'un regard les bandes consternés.
Le Rhône avec effroi le reçoit sur ses bords;
La Seine voit rougir ses eaux épouvantées;
Sa présence s'annonce aux cités devastées
Par des fleuves de sang et des monceaux de morts.
Sous de pareils vanqueurs, sous de tels ennemis,
Te faut-il succomber, ô France, ô mon pays!" [3]

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[1] A German writer, calling attention to Constant's delicate sensitiveness to the *geist* of other nations, quotes Joseph Texte: "Not even Mme. de Staël had a more complete understanding of the genius of the different European nations."

[2] *Le Siège de Soissons: Epopée anti-Napoléonienne.* Edited by Victor Waille. Poligny, 1892.

[3] "Conqueror of the humbled Apennines
He crushes under his weight the astonished Alps,
And of his feeble enemies
Shatters at a glance the panic-stricken troops.
The Rhone in terror receives him on its banks,
The Seine sees its frightened waters redden;
His presence is announced to devastated cities
By rivers of blood and heaps of corpses.
Before such a conqueror, before such a foe,
Must we succumb, O France, O my country!"

Talleyrand appears too as the conqueror's polished and elegant favourite, whose soul

> "With a sigh resigns itself to crime . . .
> And when he strikes his victim
> 'Tis himself who seems to merit sympathy."

M. Waille has traced other resemblances, less patent to the uninitiated. He finds Fouché, Napoleon's chief of police, masquerading as the mysterious Narbal; Didier, the vanquished but obstinate king, is the King of Prussia; and Florestan, the hero, is Alexander of Russia, unless, as Herriot thinks, he is Benjamin himself. The fairy courtesan Elga, her forehead crowned with a brilliant aigrette, can be none other than Mme. de Staël; and the enchanted palace in which she holds the wounded Florestan a prisoner is certainly an etherealized Coppet, with all its motley and restless life—its servitors, guests and courtiers amusing themselves with epigrams nonchalantly tossed to each other—delightfully symbolized.

> "Quel est ce palais fantastique
> Qui s'élève au sein du désert ?
> Par quelle puissance magique
> Plane-t-il ainsi dans les airs ?
> Il repose sur les nuages
> Mais l'œil trompé du voyageur
> Croit le voir d'un lac enchanteur
> Orner les verdoyants rivages.
> Par qui donc est-il habité ?
> Est-ce une Déesse, une fée ?
> Quel est tout ce peuple agité ?
> . . . . . .
> Les uns s'élancent jusqu'aux cieux ;
> Les autres plongent dans les ondes.
> D'autres d'un chant mélodieux
> Remplissent les grottes profondes.
> Regardez-les à chaque instant
> Changer de couleur et de forme !
> . . . . . .
> Aux milieu d'eux leur souveraine,
> Femme, oiseau, serpent, tour à tour,
> Excite ou modère, sans peine
> Les jeux de son étrange cour."[1]

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[1] "What is this palace fantastic
Which rises on the breast of the desert ?
By what magical power
Does it thus float aloft in the air ?
It reposes on the clouds,
But the eye of the traveller, deceived,

From a lofty balcony this enchantress watches for the pilgrim mortals whom she may lure into her toils. Like the mistress of Coppet, Elga, " fated to seduce, has deceived a thousand lovers and has never loved one of them "; and the wounded Florestan whom she has received into her palace, and who believes that he has won her love, fares no better than the rest, for if she accepts him she must forfeit her golden sceptre and her sovereign state. Pride triumphs over her passion, and passion takes flight.

On the whole, despite some remarkably good verses and excellent satirical characterizations, *Le Siège de Soissons* interests us biographically rather than for its literary merits. The episode of Elga, malicious and cruel though it is (it has been suggested that the whole poem was written to " amuse " Mme. Récamier), would be of considerably greater value did we not possess *Adolphe*.

Constant's pamphlets and articles for the newspapers and his speeches in the Chamber of Deputies at the different epochs of his political career, many of which were afterwards collected by him for publication, have already been referred to, and in many cases analysed in their proper cases. It remains to sum up briefly the political philosophy and constitutional theories of this great publicist, before speaking more fully of his *History of Religions*, which was the expression of these theories in another form. After Constant's death, Coulmann, the devoted disciple of his later years, wrote :

" Throughout his life he worshipped Liberty as others adore Power. One dominating trait of his character . . . was his profound horror of all violent methods."

Thinks he sees it adorning
The emerald banks of an enchanted lake.
By whom, then, is it inhabited ?
Is it a goddess, a fairy ?
What are all these agitated people ?
. . . . . .
Some leap up into the very heavens ;
Others plunge down beneath the waves ;
Others with their melodious chant
Fill the deep grottoes.
See how at every instant
They change their colour and form !
. . . . . .
In their midst their sovereign,
Woman, bird, serpent, each in turn,
Excites or controls with ease
The actions of her strange courtiers."

Starting out in 1792 with a strong sympathy for the Girondists, his dislike of violent or tyrannical methods kept him true to his creed even during the fervour of the Revolution. "Democracy is not Liberty; it is only the vulgarization of Absolutism," he said, and it was here that he stood always at the widest possible distance from the teachings of Rousseau and from the theories of social democracy that had been derived from them. It was the great mission of Constant's life to teach the French people the principles of this true Liberty and their application to Constitutional Government, and the treatise which most concisely and clearly sums up these principles is one which he read before the Athénée Royale of Paris in 1819, entitled *De La Liberté des Anciens.* He further developed these theories in the last part of *L'Esprit de Conquête,* and having thus proclaimed his basic doctrines of Individual Liberty and Sovereignty of the State, he devoted the four volumes of his *Principes de Politique Constitutionnelle* to trying to reconcile them. Modern publicists ever since have been trying to reconcile them too, and some of them think it is impossible to do so.

Constant had enjoyed unusual opportunities of studying constitutions and political institutions. In childhood he had added to his inheritance a love of Liberty imbibed from his classical studies. He had lived under various forms of government, that of a federation of small principalities, and of a limited monarchy, and had studied closely their laws and the conditions of their political life. During his residence in Scotland and England he had acquired a great respect for Whig principles and for the English Constitution, which he understood better than any man in France; and his intimacy with Necker and Mme. de Staël had developed and deepened this admiration for two of the English institutions especially, that of two legislative chambers, one of which should be composed of a strong and enlightened aristocracy, and that of the responsibility of the ministers, based on the principle that "The King reigns and does not govern," which he was the first to teach to the French nation. Like Mme. de Staël, he believed that a Constitutional Monarchy would fit in better with the political organization of Europe than a Republic. But he was an opportunist, and it was his nature to try to adapt himself to things as they are. "While waiting for what is good I will adopt that which is least bad," was his policy, and this often gave him the appearance of instability. Faguet, taking exception to this lack of party spirit, describes how, "whether it was the Directoire, the Consulat or the Cent Jours, Constant settled himself there, made himself

perfectly at home, and then coolly unfurled his programme of Political Liberty, *which never changed.*" Although Constant may have derived some of his theories from his reading of Montesquieu and Kant, the development and application of them to the concrete problems at hand was thoroughly his own, and made them apprehensible to the simplest intellects. Because his principles were almost unheard of then, the masses of his fellow-citizens ranked him as a dangerous Radical. To-day they are too well understood and commonly accepted to raise a protest.

Perhaps a few quotations will fortify these assertions as to the originality of his teachings. The Duc de Broglie, leader of the Centre in the Chamber, from whose party Constant separated after he became Deputy, wrote: "He was the first to teach Republican government to the nation." Armand Carrel, editor of the *Nationale*, wrote in 1832, "He was the man who during fifteen years had done the most for the constitutional education of France. He taught to every one the philosophy of Government, which had hitherto been inaccessible to ordinary minds." Lord Broughton (John Hobhouse) said that Constant's pamphlet on the Responsibility of Ministers was considered at the time of its appearance to contain "a mine of undiscovered truths." Léon Duguit, an eminent French juridical authority, foremost teacher of the realistic as opposed to the metaphysical doctrines of government, in a treatise on *The Law and the State* (1917), asserts that "among the best representatives of the doctrine [of State Sovereignty as limited by individual rights] there are none superior to Benjamin Constant . . . one of the most vigorous and brilliant minds of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century."

The power vested in the State to make laws, the right of the individual to limit that power by claiming recognition of his rights as an individual—these two doctrines almost universally accepted by French publicists ever since—dominated Constant's political philosophy. If he failed to clearly define that point in the individual right where the Sovereignty of the State ceased to be operative (or as Faguet asserts, ended by placing Sovereignty nowhere), certainly no other publicist from Montesquieu down has been any more successful than he in determining the limits of Sovereignty, whether they rest with the King, with the State, with the Parliament, or with the individual. Sovereignty, as understood by those who vested it wholly in the State, in Constant's opinion meant the right to act in the interests of public order without being called to account for such acts. Those who followed Rousseau's *Contrat*

Social in placing it in the will of the majority, reached in the end by a logical process such absolutist doctrines as those upon which the German theory of Empire was built. Constant's system is the direct opposite of Rousseau's, for while Rousseau believed the object of political organization to be the assurance to mankind of the enjoyment of their natural rights through the general will of the nation, Constant denounced the theory that the general will could not err. "Since power must be delegated, acts done in the name of all are necessarily in the control of only one person, or of a very few,"[1] and what no tyrant would dare to do in his own name would be made legitimate through this unlimited social authority. Thus in constraining individuals despite their resistance, the people conceived as all-powerful are as dangerous as any tyrant. Rousseau's doctrine of the omnipotence of the majority, therefore, which assumes that if the individual will does not agree with the general will, the individual will is in error, he demonstrates to be a sophism, and he disputes the right of the majority will, in all instances, to sanction arbitrary acts. "There are some powers which neither the people nor their delegates have a right to. Whether the authority committing such acts is called individual or nation is of no consequence, although it emanates from the whole nation minus the citizen who is oppressed." Rousseau has misunderstood this truth, and his error has "made the *Contrat Social*, so often invoked in favour of liberty, the most vicious auxiliary to every kind of despotism." Rousseau's theories of Liberty "have furnished the pretext for all the arrogations of tyranny." The object of political organization, then, is not the equality of all its members, since the actual and inherent inequalities existing between citizens cannot be effaced by any such principles. The object is to give the citizen political liberty which guarantees to him the enjoyment of other liberties, such as liberty of person—from arrest, or arbitrary surveillance; liberty and inviolability of the home, liberty of opinion—in religion, in political and philosophical opinions; liberty of the press; liberty of vote, that is direct participation in elections; liberty of industrial and commercial life—freedom to regulate his own affairs.

The laws regulating these liberties must be the fewest possible, and if they must be made (and the English nation was fortunate in having a constitution which grew rather than was made) it must be on the principle that no more of the individual's rights may be taken from him than is absolutely necessary for the

[1] *Cours de Politique*, i. chap. i., "De la Souveraineté du Peuple."

subsistence of the State. Constant thus opens up the whole question of the conscientious objector, the right of the individual to refuse to conform to the law. He faced it bravely and honestly.

"Obedience to law is a duty; but like all duties it is not absolute, it is relative; it rests on the supposition that the law emanates from a legitimate source and is confined within just limits. This duty does not cease when the law departs from this rule only in certain respects. We ought to sacrifice a great deal for the sake of the public peace; we should render ourselves guilty in the eyes of morality if by too inflexible attachment to our rights we should disturb the peace as soon as it seemed to us that they were being infringed upon in the name of the law." [1]

On the other hand, he states that "no duty would bind us to laws which not only would restrain our legitimate liberties and limit actions with which they had no right to interfere, but which would also command us to act contrary to the eternal principles of justice or piety." Thus he shows that the right of refusal to obey a law contrary to right should be exercised with caution. "As long as a law, even though bad, does not tend to deprave us, as long as authority demands of us only such sacrifices as render us neither vile nor cruel, we can submit to it." If there must be resistance he advocates passive resistance, "not to become a party to the execution of an unjust law."

"There is no excuse for a man who lends his sanction to a law which he believes to be iniquitous, or for a judge who presides in a court which he believes to be illegal or pronounces a sentence of which he disapproves, or for a minister who orders the execution of a decree contrary to his conscience, or for the satellite who arrests a man whom he knows to be innocent for the purpose of giving him up to his executioners."

Thus he seems to place the limits of the State's sovereignty in the conscience, in man's knowledge of moral law. Constant is aware that here he is treading on very thin ice.

"Note that those very people who declare that implicit obedience to laws, whatever those laws may be, is an absolute and inexorable duty, always except from this rule the things which particularly touch them. Pascal made an exception of religion; he did not submit to the authority of civil law in matters of religion, and he braved persecution by his disobedience in this respect."

[1] *Cours de Politique.* Additions et notes; "Des Droits Individus."

If we "say that we obey laws only in so far as they are just, we shall find ourselves authorizing resistance to Law in the most senseless and culpable instances, and anarchy will reign everywhere." M. Duguit, whose treatise on the Law and the State is an appreciative and learned study of Constant's theories, states that although Benjamin Constant does not say so expressly, nevertheless he "certainly believes in the existence of a supreme tribunal in every State, chosen in such a way that independence, impartiality, and knowledge would be above suspicion of any kind; which, upon request from the citizens, would be charged with deciding what laws conform to superior right, and which would have the power to annul such laws as are in contradiction thereto." Although such a tribunal may answer to certain conditions laid down by Constant, he cannot be said to have advocated such a tribunal, and it is doubtful if he would have delegated the decisions of the individual conscience to any such group as a solution of the difficulty. His tendency toward decentralization of power would have led him away from any relation of municipal to central government which would in any way resemble a federation. The opposition to Socialism among his followers springs from this distrust of centralization, not only as leading to tyranny over individuals, but "because a centralized government does everything badly." The essence of Liberalism as taught by Constant and developed afterwards by his party is in direct antagonism to the present trend toward either Social Democracy or Absolutism.

Constant's reputation, both with his own age and with posterity, has suffered the fate that is bound to befall a man who, in the pursuit of his principles, refuses to be tied to a party or a school of thought. Politically and intellectually, as well as in his private relations, he was an independent. He joined a party or a group when and as long as there seemed to be a chance to promote his principles. If he saw a better chance elsewhere, or if the party he joined proved to be working less for principles than for political objects, he broke loose and appeared in the camp where there seemed a better opportunity of obtaining support. When he felt that he had been mistaken in his tactics or judgment, he was not afraid to change, and his horror of force, tyranny, cruelty, or any kind of excess in governmental methods drove him to desert his best friends if he saw them drifting that way. In all this he was perfectly true and loyal to his own convictions and to the ideals that seemed to him the only ones worth fighting for.

But the result was that he left little groups of enemies in every camp. When he severed from the Constitutional Monarchists, when he deserted the Doctrinaires, when he refused to follow the Liberals in their rush for Democracy—each time he increased the number of those who were ready to cry " turn-coat " and to throw mud at a character which had left so many weak spots exposed to attack. Hence that " lack of consideration " which his best friends lamented. As soon as he was dead and the acclaims of his services to Liberalism had died away, the malice and resentment of his many enemies seized upon every shred of scandal against his private life, and besmirched through the reputation of their leader the followers and admirers of his teachings. By the wills and by the efforts of people intimately affected, his private papers which would have explained so much were sealed to the public for many years, and his great services to France were buried under a heap of scandalous stuff gleaned or stolen from this source and that. No serious attempt to rescue his public life from this muck-heap was made until he had been dead seventy-five years, and even now his frailties interest the public more than his splendid services to the cause of Liberal Government.

Constant's liberalism and individualism were not confined to his political principles. His *History of Religions*,[1] though most of its theories would pass for orthodox to-day, was in his lifetime so radical in trend, even after he had discarded the eighteenth-century materialism which had been his starting-point, that the Duchesse de Broglie wrote Barante that she did not believe he would dare to publish the book before the elections for the Chamber.

The *History of Religions*, could we study it in the successive manuscript forms it assumed during the forty years of its incubation (after he settled in Paris he wrote that he had found twenty different plans for it among his papers), would furnish a complete outline of his mental and philosophical development. From his allusions to it in his letters and journals as the dearest object of his thoughts, for the sake of which he longed to drop his political controversies and return to a scholar's life, this work which he started purely for love of the thing, came eventually to represent his real self, his inner life. As through the books he read, the friends with whom he conversed, the events upon which he meditated or from which he suffered, new light was shed upon a problem or an idea, causing him to give it a new interpretation, the hypothesis upon which his

[1] *De la Religion, considerée dans ses sources, ses formes et ses développements.* 5 vols. Bruxelles, 1824–31.

philosophy rested was gradually altered, and the little pieces of paper upon which the material he had gathered was written had to be shifted or re-grouped to suit the new aspect of truth he beheld. " The facts were all there ; it was merely the opinions about them that changed," he said.

The casual reader of the record of Benjamin's outer life may experience a shock at the affirmation of the editor of his last and posthumous volume of the *History of Religions*, that Constant, who had " seen everything, experienced everything—pleasures of reasoning, bitterness of doubt, charms of truth, intoxication of self-love, pride of the egoist, . . . homage, party conflicts—had throughout been dominated by a single thought, and this thought was religion." " At every period of a life so changeful," he says, " Benjamin Constant places above everything the religious question, the mission he has assumed of proclaiming the moral Charte of the human soul, at the same time that he was working for the incidental mission of proclaiming the political Charte to his country." To the great publicist's contemporaries, who had never read his diaries and letters, the notion of this inveterate scoffer, this famous wit of salons, this ironical orator of the Tribune, this hero of many scandals and duels, this reckless votary of the gaming-table, posing as the historian and interpreter of religious forms and sentiments, was preposterous. That a man who professed affiliation with no sect or church should write of religion struck them as paradoxical. Delacluze relates that at a little assembly of Liberals one evening, Mme. Récamier asked Constant why he manifested such indifference to the subject he had treated in his book. To which he replied carelessly that it was less the author who spoke in this work than the facts themselves, and that he was responsible for but one thing in it, namely, the citations and proofs. He then turned the conversation to politics and attacked the Government with " all the irony and cynicism of his wit." Against this may be cited an entry in his Journal when he was in Weimar (1804) : " Disputed with Schlegel, who maintained an absurd assertion: that a man can write about religion *without* religion." Another anecdote which we owe to Sainte-Beuve represents him as replying to a question put to him at the gambling-table, toward the end of his life and shortly before his book appeared, as to how he was occupying himself : " I no longer occupy myself with anything but religion ; the beginning and the end meet ! " These stories, which might easily be multiplied, may be compared with his letters to Barante and to Hochet, in which he discusses the progress of his *History*,

and which reveal the growth and nature of his inmost religious emotions and beliefs. Rachel Varnhagen[1] lamented that she had "found no echo" of the great realities of faith in the "lovable Benjamin." "Concerning the inner God he never spoke at all; . . . everything, every thought, he dealt with in the same confirmed scepticism as one to whom doubt had become a sort of veneer." Benjamin's dread of incurring ridicule by appearing to take himself too seriously, his instinct, bred of hypersensitiveness, to hide his deeper feelings, caused him to parry by a jest any probings into his inner life. No one realized this more keenly than he. "I have suffered often because people infer from what I say what I must do," he wrote Barante. "People see only the facts, while it is not the facts but the heart which is the incommunicable part of us."

Although both by inheritance and by education Benjamin started life as a sceptic, it is nevertheless true that religious questions had always a deep significance for him. He had no sympathy with those who, like Voltaire, scoffed at things which were sacred to others, or who, like Cabanis, took satisfaction in demonstrating the truths of atheism to a nation which had every need of religion. He longed to believe, and never resigned himself to accept his doubts as final, but sought unceasingly for a basis of faith which his intellect could accept.

It must be conceded that this search for religious truth was stimulated, not by the moral sense and as a basis for conduct and character-building, but as a refuge from the sorrows of life. The dread of death which haunted him with morbid imaginings from childhood to old age, and the anguish of broken friendships, futile hopes, endless controversies, and misunderstandings—these were the things for which he sought comfort and assurance in a belief in God and Immortality. To this personal motive many other stimuli were added: his early interest in Greek mythology—that sentence in his childish letter to his grandmother about preferring "Homer, who is the father of the religion of the Ancients," is not without significance—the perpetual conversations about religion, philosophy, metaphysics, in which he engaged while in the society of Mme. de Charrière and Mme. de Staël, the touch of mysticism and emotionalism in his own nature which had attracted him to Langallerie and his coterie of mystics, and later to the Krüdener cult—all these explain his preoccupation with abstract theological and philosophical questions. Yet in his religious opinions he showed the same distrust of conventionalism, of unquestioning

[1] Constant had been an occasional guest at her salon since 1803.

acceptance, and the same fearlessness in analysis and in discrimination between truths and assertions, that marked his political opinions, and he soon acquired the reputation of being a sceptic as well as a dangerous democrat (in the old sense), and this the more easily as Liberalism in religion was a conspicuous attribute of the party to which he belonged.

As the philosophical thesis with which he had started out at the age of eighteen crumbled under the weight of German scholarship, and his interpretation of the facts he had already gathered in his researches changed, his *History of Religions* was continually being ravelled out and knit anew in order to keep true to his gradual approach to a degree of faith in God and in a future life. The original conception of the book grew out of his reading of the Encyclopædists and of the conversations of Mme. de Charrière and of those older philosophers whom he met at Suard's. His intention at first was to write of Polytheism only, with the purpose of " dispelling prejudice " against the so-called heathen religions, and of proving the superiority of Paganism to Christianity; a very common thesis with self-confident youth, but one for which he had at that time but a meagre equipment. " A few facts taken at random," he says in the *Cahier Rouge*, " and many epigrams and assertions which I thought novel," were the capital on which he began.

" If I had been less indolent and if I had abandoned myself less to every sensation that moved me, I would perhaps have finished in two years a very bad book which would have brought me a little ephemeral reputation, with which I would have been entirely satisfied. Once pledged to it by my vanity I would not have been able to change my opinion, and the first paradox then adopted would have enchained me for my whole life."

But the vastness of the field that opened soon swamped him. Moreover, the French Revolution had broken out; the work flagged. Then enter Mme. de Staël, and his thoughts and activities are diverted into politics. When he once more resumed the study of religions at Weimar in 1804, he had already come under the influence of German philosophy and especially of Kant, from whom he may have taken the idea of God as not demonstrable by reason, but apprehended by a special and higher set of ideas than those used for material things. Notwithstanding the distaste he professed at first for the German " mixture of mysticism and science," he met in Weimar a group of men who were absorbed in the study of metaphysics, and he wrote Barante that German philo-

sophical books, which had been unintelligible when he read them in Paris, were clear and convincing when read in that environment.

He was much assisted in his studies by the researches of the archæologist Böttiger in the Homeric field, as appears in a series of letters to him written between 1804 and 1814. Constant's knowledge of Böttiger's work brought them into correspondence before they met in Weimar, where Böttiger was at that time director of the Gymnasium, and the correspondence later led to friendship. After his return to France he borrowed from Böttiger's library many volumes not to be found in Paris. Constant's letters to Hochet and Barante at this time reflect the influence of the new world of German thought upon his opinions.

"I am no longer that fearless philosopher, sure that there is nothing after this world, and so pleased with this world that he rejoices that there is no other. My work is a singular proof of what Bacon says, that a little learning leads to atheism and more learning to religion. . . . Each step backward has cost me something. Even yet all my habits and all my associations are philosophical, and I defend, step by step, all that religion reconquers from me." (To Hochet, Hardenberg, October 11, 1811.)

It is not to an orthodox faith in revealed religion that he thus capitulates. "They all seek for the origin of Religion in circumstances extraneous to man," he says (Book I., *History of Religions*). ". . . Some think it is revelation; others, external forces." It certainly is revelation, but "this revelation is universal, it is permanent, it has its source in the human heart. Man needs only to listen to himself, he needs only to listen to Nature speaking to him by a thousand voices, in order to be irresistibly drawn to religion." It is evident that the study of Kant had been tinged by the doctrines of *Les Âmes Intérieures*. In September 1808 he wrote: "I have been reading a great deal of what they call the Mystics of late, and notably Mme. Guyon, and I have read them in a spirit of perfect good faith, with no fixed belief, but also without prejudice and in great weariness of incredulity. Religion is to the soul what the highest pleasures are to the senses. Reason has nothing to do with it."

Thus from viewing religion as merely one form of mental development, the work of human society, modified in its forms by different degrees of civilization, he came into the conception of the Religious Sentiment. "The soul no longer appeared to him to be moved only from without and by the senses," writes his friend Barante. "But he began to think that religious feelings were inherent, innate,

disposed in germ within the soul . . . and this idea inspired one of the most beautiful things he ever wrote—the chapter on the Religious Sentiment." Benjamin read this chapter to Barante, proposing to make it the preface to his entire work. Then as he reflected upon what he had already done, " my book will have to be rewritten ! " he cried.

A further step was taken when his political ideals became more fully crystallized. The division between the Catholics and the Protestants under the Restoration was as much political as religious ; the right to worship according to conscience—a right proclaimed by the *Charte*—and the necessity of establishing political barriers against theocratic power, were important articles in the Liberal creed since that party was largely recruited from the Protestants. As the first volume of the *History of Religions* appeared in the spring of 1824 at the height of the struggle, and the two succeeding volumes were finished among Benjamin's fiercest combats against autocracy and clericalism, the work finally assumed a political cast. The preface to volume I. calls upon the Friends of Liberty not to " smother the convictions which, by giving them strength to be martyrs, form the basis for the virtue of true citizens." To M. Cauchais-Lemaire he wrote that he believed that the anti-clerical cause would gain something by an analysis of his work.

Constant's whole nature was in revolt against unnecessary rules, forms or laws, which trammelled the freedom of the individual, just as he was ever ready to turn to ridicule all kinds of insincerity, hypocrisy and charletanism. Hence forms and ceremonies would seem to him to be the trappings of tyranny.

" Religion is a vast country," he wrote, " attacked and defended with tenacity, but which no disinterested traveller has visited in order to give us a faithful description. Up to the present, it is only the externalities of religion which have been considered. Its dogmas, creeds, practices, ceremonies, are the forms which the inward sentiment assumes, and afterwards shatters." (*History of Religions*, Book I.)

Man, he says, seeks, according to his instincts and enlightenment, to discover the connection between himself and the invisible forces, and when he thinks he has discovered them he gives them a regular and determined form. Thus are evolved the creeds and ceremonies. But meanwhile his other faculties are developing, and the arresting of the development of the religious faculties, by their embodiment in fixed forms, causes a lack of correspondence between them and the faculties which have kept on perfecting.

Henceforth the destruction of these forms, though delayed artificially for a time by the force of institutions, is inevitable. Thus is brought about the eternal struggle between established religion and the progressive intellect, between religion and the sentiment which it no longer satisfies. In the third stage, the crisis of incredulity is complete. A readjustment and expurgation of dead matter follows, and from her ashes " religion arises younger and more beautiful than ever."

From this point he develops his two favourite theories, that of the Religious Sentiment and that of the ultimate perfectibility of man, which have their counterpart in his political theories.

" There is in reason, apart from sentiment, a material portion—if one may so speak—which resists all the transports of the soul. To apply it in its barrenness and with its limitations, to religion, is like applying arithmetic to poetry. . . . It shows us clearly in our daily path the rocks we strike against, the abysses into which we fall, but turned toward Heaven it is only a terrestrial torch, which hides from us the splendour of the stars." (*History of Religions*, Book I.)

It is only the religious sentiment that can light up heaven for us. This it is which leads man on, stumbling, among the mundane obstacles which he is destined to overcome, to the higher life which is calling him. " His advance is ruled, it is inevitable. His progress may be blocked or interrupted, but *nothing can give it for any long duration an opposite direction.*"

Constant makes no attempt to distinguish the religious from the moral sentiment, or to explain its existence. It is a mystery ; reason cannot explain it ; lofty aspirations and noble deeds foster it, it is true, but only God can give it. It is the message of the Inner Voice. It is the assurance of a survival after this life is ended.

" Power may pursue us, falsehood wound us, hatred strike us where we love most. Old age advances upon us, sombre and solemn epoch when objects we love begin to grow dim and withdraw from us. . . . Even life escapes us as we hasten toward another life. If there be none, how pitiful, how terrible this universal concourse of suffering beings, these cries of agony rising from all parts of the earth towards a firmament of glass, only to remain unanswered, and the sustaining illusion which is transmitted to us as an answer, merely the confused murmur of so many prayers echoing afar off in the ether ! "

Constant's religious philosophy then was the answer to his pessimism. It was created out of the longing and fear that was

in his own heart. It was very vague, very mysterious, a sentiment, a dream. It was closely allied to what he called *superstition.* It sprang rather from hope than from a process of demonstration.

For the time at which it was written, the *History of Religions* was an erudite work. It did much to bring the results of German philosophical thought to the attention of French philosophers. It " sparkled with eloquence on every page," the Duchesse de Broglie said, but it was too religious to suit the ordinary readers, and not sufficiently scientific in method to please the learned. Neither was it sufficiently partisan or abusive to please the sectarian. De Broglie's opinion that " from doubting all religions he had come to revere them all equally," indicates that he had chosen the way to be popular with none. It is probable that the general public, as Rosalie had foreseen, did not even read it. Even she found it tedious, " especially the mythological details," and hard reading, and only liked the passages on death and sorrow. And to-day the great work by which Constant hoped to achieve fame is antiquated, unread, unknown—while his casual *Adolphe* is included in every text-book of French literature, and to be found on many a French news-stand. Modern scholarship, the great advance in the knowledge of the Jewish and Oriental religions, as well as of Greek and Scandanavian mythology, have consigned Constant's voluminous work to oblivion. The theories he thought so fresh and so bold are discussed in every classroom and preached from every pulpit.

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST YEARS

(1830)

"WE are the intermediate generation, we fight that others 1830
may conquer!" cried Constant in the midst of one of the stormy sessions of 1820. The reign he had helped to bring in postponed the victory for which he fought for a whole generation. He lived to see the results of the Revolution of July only five months, and his enjoyment of the honour it had brought him was brief. The painful spinal trouble from which he continued to suffer was progressing rapidly; paralysis, he wrote Rosalie in September, was "creeping on, from the feet upwards"; yet, with his digestion and his eyesight failing, he still kept up by the use of drugs, and struggled on even after the game was up, "like Ariosto's knight, fighting after he was decapitated and not knowing it." Charles, when he met him in Paris, found him feeble and broken in body and in voice, yet still the brilliant and witty talker. "His career seems to be over," he said; "he would seem to be well enough off if he were more respected personally, if his health were better, and if perhaps his financial situation were easier." Charles, it must be remembered, was not in sympathy with Benjamin's political principles or the company with which they linked him.

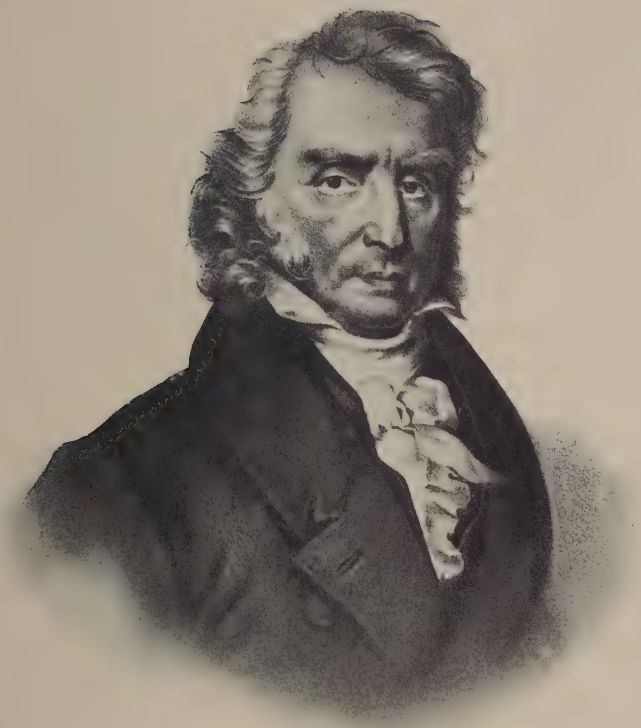
Yet Constant had managed to pay another visit to his electors in Alsace during the summer of 1829, taking them in on his Baden trip, and had enjoyed once more the pleasant hospitality of the Coulmanns and the Hartmanns, with the usual serenades and dinners and toasts and Bengal lights and the songs about "*Où peut-on être mieux*," etc. He was too ill to address the crowds himself, and delegated that to the young law student who accompanied him; but feeble as he was, his craving for excitement and attention sustained him through a round of entertainments, even to the extent of attending the firemen's parade at Mulhouse. His

1829 constituents in Alsace presented him on this last visit with a silver cup crowned with oak leaves and decorated with an allegorical design representing the Charte defended by a lion. Throughout his journeying the faithful Charlotte, now rendered indispensable by his infirmities, accompanied him. Socially she still filled a rather obscure position, but as a helpmate she seems to have finally vindicated her right to the place for which she had waited so long and so humbly. The Constants had moved in 1822 from the *hôtel garni* in the Faubourg St. Honoré (rue des Saussages No. 13), which they had occupied upon their return to Paris, to a house in the rue d'Anjou (No. 17), where they managed to keep up a very good style of living, and to entertain considerably. It was not, to be sure, the society under whose auspices Benjamin had been launched upon Paris in his youth; rather was it representative of those progressive, substantial, middle-class people for whom some historians of the Restoration manifest a slight contempt as respectable and banal.[1] As a fact, it was the only circle in which ideas and enthusiasms were entertained at all at that time. Lafayette's salon was the rendezvous of these people, and they also gathered in the drawing-rooms of the wealthy banker, Lafitte, of Mme. Gay and of Mme. de Gérando. At Constant's dinner-table young journalists and law students listened respectfully to the discussions between the leaders of the Left in the Chamber of Deputies, and the industrial nabobs from the Departments. A letter from Charles to Rosalie, written in 1825, sheds light on the Constant *intérieur*. "You will be better cared for and entertained [at Mme. de Duras'], " he wrote her, when she was contemplating visiting Paris and making her headquarters at her cousin's, "and I shall be more at ease about your health, your welfare and your enjoyment. The Benjamins live in a whirl, and in a disorderly style. Politics, dissensions, play too big a rôle with them, and Benjamin, as happens with many intellectual men, is less amiable at home than in society. I would prefer Mme. de Duras to Charlotte for a *tête-à-tête*." [2]

Constant certainly "lived in a whirl" of enterprises and

[1] In 1828 Constant wrote of this society (in answer to a request from Miss Berry for criticisms of her book on *Social Life in England and France*): "The new nation has overturned French society, and, in overturning it, has entered it and become not only the political state but the actual social state. The old society vainly seeks refuge, like mice, in one old-time salon after another. It no longer exists, except as a memory. . . . It is the new generation that must be studied." (Quoted in Miss Berry's Journal.)

[2] Geneva Archives.



BENJAMIN CONSTANT

From a lithograph in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

activities. His days were filled with all sorts of schemes—law- 1830
suits, business, duels, politics, lectures and clubs—notwithstanding the frequent illnesses which confined him to his chair for weeks together. Before the day had actually commenced he had worn out his secretary with the newspaper articles and speeches that he had dictated. On certain evenings he lectured at the Athénée on politics or philosophy or religion, and he was a prominent member of the Société de la Morale Chrétienne. Every one who had a petition to present or a favour to beg or a grievance to be adjusted, appealed to him. No one could get along without him. He was in demand everywhere—everywhere, that is, except at the Academy—and he took part in everything except the conspiracies. Barante thought all this feverish activity sprang from the same thirst for excitement which drove him to the gambling-tables of the *Cercle des Étrangers*, where his nights were generally passed. It was undoubtedly the stimulant that kept him alive. "I detest agitations which are purely personal," he himself admitted; "and everything which concerns the individual seems to me not worth the struggle. But political agitation, which stimulates the ideas and faculties, delights me."

It is with a feeling of sadness that we approach the end of this varied and agitated life, notwithstanding that it actually realized so much richer returns than many had believed to be possible. For, after all is said, it was a lonely, disappointed, weary old man who wrote:

"The years roll on; they carry away our strength, and bring our infirmities; they take from us all ability to enjoy and they leave us for our solace the past, which is sad, and give us for anticipation the future, which is short. I thank you for what you say of my use of my life. I have not done one quarter of what I should have done. If I were not at heart greatly ashamed of having wasted my time and my strength, I should be very proud of all the kind things which are said about what I have done, in spite of the waste. And after all, what does it matter? There is a grave which awaits the industrious and the indolent alike, fame as well as obscurity, and which closes tranquilly, indifferently, over what it covers. Yet I would like to see you before I go down into it. But I make no plans, and I see so many people dying around me, who had counted on the future, that I scarcely believe that I am still alive. I work in order to leave, as they say, something behind me; this me—what will it be and what will there be in common between me and what I shall have left? Never mind! I work because it is my habit, and because time hangs heavy on my hands." (To Rosalie, Baden, November 18, 1828.)

1830 To Sismondi, whom he still met occasionally, he confessed that although he went constantly to social gatherings, he avoided people, and often spoke to no one in the houses where he went. We have a final glimpse of him from the pen of Alfred de Vigny, then a young and almost unknown poet, who met him in a Paris drawing-room and was flattered to be noticed and praised by the veteran of many Chambers. He notes his noble profile, his gracious and polished deportment, already becoming one of the traditions of the "old school" to this younger generation, and the "rare union of the man of the world with the man of letters"; and his romantic fancy perceived traces in the veteran of the sadness of "ungratified ambitions which would not be satisfied with a peerage or even the place of Prime Minister, and did not stop short of the Presidency of a Republic."

In spite of his increasing infirmities, Constant had taken his usual place among the deputies at the autumn sessions of the Chamber of 1830, and had made several speeches in support of Liberty of Instruction, of a Free Press, and against the proposition to impeach Lameth. On one of these occasions, which happened to be the very day of his defeat in the Academy elections, he alluded to his disappointment in the following words, as an apology for his hastily-prepared speech: "Feebleness of body and sadness of heart —a sadness I do not presume to explain to you—many understand it, many share it." On the 19th of November a proposition which he submitted in the Chamber with regard to the regulation of printing and bookselling was rejected in every article by an overwhelming vote and amid "loud laughter." His rejection as a candidate for the Academy being fresh in his heart, there seems no doubt that the chagrin of the last repulse was the final blow to his failing strength. It was his last speech from the Tribune. One rebuff after another had discouraged him, and the multiplicity of business which beset him, and the importunities of office-seekers, exhausted him. On the 26th of November he made his last appearance in the Chamber. Thenceforth he was confined to his home, visited, to be sure, by many friends, both old and new, but gradually failing in body, not failing in mind, however. On the very last day of his life, although he was suffering the most acute pain, he attempted to correct the proofs for the final volume of his History of Religions. "The rest to-morrow," he said, when unable to continue. On the following day, the 8th of December, the Chamber received the tidings of his death. He had met the spectre which all his life he had followed and feared.

Coulmann, the young lawyer who gave to him in his last 1830
years the devoted attentions of a son and a disciple, and to whom Constant related many reminiscences and anecdotes of his earlier years, tells us that Constant knew by heart the best poems on Death—English, German, Italian and French—and was wont to repeat them often in his old age. It may be that amid his toil over his manuscripts and his outlines for his speeches, the sentiment these favourite verses expressed carried his thoughts back through the years to that little essay on " Death " which he and Rosalie were set to write in those far-away days at his grandmother's side. These are some of his favourite lines which Coulmann has preserved for us :

" L'âme entrevoit le terme du chemin ;
Déjà s'enfuit, sous l'ombre qui s'abaisse,
L'éclat mourant d'un soir sans lendemain.
Du poids des ans s'accroit notre faiblesse.
La mort est là, courbée par la vieillesse.
Quand nous touchons à ses pieds redoutés
Son front immense est caché dans la nue ;
Mais quand le spectre échappe à notre vue,
Nous le sentons debout à nos côtés." [1]

Already, in the introductory pages of this book, we have narrated how all Paris turned out to honour Constant's memory on the 12th of December, when his body was borne in state from the Protestant Church in the rue St. Antoine to the Cemetery of Père Lachaise. It was not merely the funeral of a great publicist, distinguished for his services to the Government of France, that the Liberals of the Revolution of July united to honour ; they made it the occasion of celebrating the recent victory of their party in which he had taken an active part. In anticipation of this funeral they had renewed in the Chamber the proposition, already initiated during the Revolution, to convert the Church of St. Geneviève into

[1] " The soul has a glimpse of the end of the road ;
Already departs, 'neath the gathering gloom,
The dying splendour of a night without morrow.
'Neath the burden of years our feebleness grows ;
This is death—bent by age.
While we touch his dreaded feet
His huge face is hidden in clouds.
But even when the spectre eludes our sight,
We feel him standing by our side."
(Quoted in Coulmann's address before the Society of Christian Morals, April 1831. MS. copy in Geneva Archives.)

1830 a Panthéon where the patriots of the nation should be interred. Already Mirabeau's ashes had been brought there, but under Charles, Roman Catholic services had been resumed in the church, and the enemies of the Revolution now bitterly opposed such desecration of its uses. The students who had begged the privilege of carrying Constant's bier in the funeral procession to Père Lachaise, made a sudden attempt to lead the crowds in the direction of the river and on to the Panthéon, in defiance of the adverse decision of the Government, but the intervention of the police and the promise extorted from the Prefect of the Seine that the busts of the three Liberal heroes, Constant, Manuel and Foy, should be placed in the Hôtel de Ville, finally quieted the threatened disturbance, and the procession resumed its march to Père Lachaise in an orderly manner. Several of the most distinguished Liberals, among them Odillon-Barrot—the advocate who had helped Benjamin to save the life of the peasant Regnault—Tissot, his old collaborator on the *Mercure*, Eusèbe Salverte, Labordie, Principre, as well as his two closest friends, Coulmann and General Lafayette, delivered addresses at the grave. For a few weeks after his death the papers were filled with tributes to his memory and his services. Coulmann, at the Société de la Morale Chrêtienne, Michel Berr at the *Athenée Royale*, Pagès, Carrel, and other of his young Liberal disciples, kept his name alive for the space of a year by their loving references or fulsome eulogies of the dead leader. Then he was forgotten ; his seat in the Chamber was filled.

The news of his death came to Rosalie at Geneva, where, since her brother Charles had become a widower, she had made her home. "He has saved the innocent," she wrote in her Journal; "he has desired what he believed would be for the welfare of humanity ; he has consecrated to it his best intellectual powers, the great talents he received from Nature. I mourn for him. I loved him in childhood, and he was gratified by my affection." To her Charlotte wrote in gratitude for her sympathetic understanding of his "noble character, his heart, so affectionate and so tortured—his necessity for excitement, precisely because it was quite inseparable from his necessity for freedom and his horror of oppression."

By the terms of his will all Constant's property and possessions of every kind went to his half-brother and sister, but as Charlotte had unsettled claims for money loaned to him, she made an agreement with the heirs which secured for herself a third part of his papers and souvenirs, on the condition that at her death they

should return to the Constant family.[1] That this division was not 1831
made without some struggle, the following letter from Charlotte to Rosalie indicates :

" Let me keep, my dear friend, that romance of his childhood; it has so much naturalness, so much of that simplicity, which neither the world nor its discipline have ever been able to destroy, and which is the stamp of a superior mind whose form is so visible in this first attempt of his youth ; oh, let me keep this exercise ! I am so glad Mme. de Loys does not begrudge it to me. She possesses treasures whose value to her I can imagine, and which she will allow me to enjoy, I am sure, while I am in Switzerland.

" Dear cousin, please rejoice at our reunion. Ah, we will settle everything, and many difficulties are greater at a distance, and end satisfactorily when people are together, with the same desire at the bottom of their hearts.

" My letter, my dear cousin, will precede by only a few days a box, . . . containing a memento which will be precious to you, and which my affection has long destined for you. It is the excellent bust of our dear Benjamin by Bra, . . . the imperishable monument of his genius. . . . This bust should be the heritage of his family, dear to all its future members, to whom it will recall him whose memory will keep on growing through succeeding centuries." [2]

This bust may have been the replica of that executed for the Hôtel de Ville, or of the one upon which Charlotte was leaning when Charles saw her for the last time in 1835 in Paris, where it occupied a niche in her salon. " It brings back to me as much as a bust can," she wrote, " the features over which all the emotions of his soul and all the inspirations of genius played with such astonishing rapidity."

" This was the age of apotheoses," observes Larousse. Béranger at the Palais Royal, Napoleon at the Gaietée and the Opéra Comique, were glorified in dramatic representations whose interest was as fugitive as their style was crude. A month after Constant's death, when the question of his " pantheonization " was still being agitated by the Liberals, he was the object of one of these apotheoses, so childish as almost to seem a burlesque, at the

[1] That this was not carried out literally is evident from the publication in 1907 of some of Mme. de Staël's later letters to him, from originals in the possession of descendants of Charlotte's son, Baron Marenholz.

[2] Geneva Archives. The Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, Senator and Member of the Court of the Hague, owns the original bust of Constant, which was in Charlotte's possession until her death.

1831 Théâtre des Ambigus on the 8th of January. The title of the play was *Benjamin Constant aux Champs Élysées.*[1] The scene was laid on the bank of the Styx, where a number of Liberals, among them Manuel, General Foy and Talma, assembled to welcome any friends that might be arriving in Charon's approaching boat. To the air of the "Barcarolle" from Marino Faliero, Mme. de Staël enters, and although since her departure from earth she has given up politics and returned to literature, she joins in the general rejoicing over the news of the Revolution of July. While they await the newcomers, Mme. de Staël, who "bears the heart of a man in the body of a woman," celebrates in song the virtues of the "Pride of the Chamber," Benjamin Constant:

"This pillar of Liberalism
In his marvellous writings
Denounces despotism
With undying scorn.
The wretched ministers
Quaked before the thunder of his voice
And his terrible words
Foretold the doom of kings."

To the sound of music the bark floats up to the shore, bearing, to the astonishment of all, the form of Benjamin Constant. In the general rush to greet him Mme. de Staël arrives first, and falls into his arms, while the chorus chants a welcome set to an air from the *Barber of Seville.* In reply to their eager request for news of the present state of Liberty on the earth, Constant assures them that Despotism quitted the world before he did. "I was able to resign myself to Power, because Power was necessary; but to Despotism never, because it was not necessary," he cries. "You all will attest that I never despaired of Liberty because I knew that it was one of God's decrees."

"Liberty! I offered it to the Emperor,
To the Bourbon gods I offered Liberty.
When they refused . . . I waited,
Assured to see at the hour of their fall
Liberty enthroned upon their ruins!"

During this declamation Charon's bark is again seen approaching, loaded with spirits, among whom is the hunchback Mayeux, a Quilp-like tool and emissary of the Liberals, notorious in news-

[1] This rare pamphlet, said by Rudler not to be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale, is in the Public Library of New York.

paper columns, where many broad jests and coarse sayings were 1831
put into his mouth. Mayeux has just attended Constant's funeral, and relates to his delighted hearers the honours paid to the dead Liberal leader.

"I was there with all France!
Ministers, bankers, soldiers,
All ranks, all states,
All schools, all arts.

No pomp, no display,
Great simplicity.
No adornments
But the tricolour flag."

The play ends with an apotheosis, Voltaire offering a crown, Mirabeau extending his hand to the hero, while Mme. de Staël comes forward with a laurel branch.

The honour of a resting-place in the Panthéon, which this odd little play was apparently an effort to secure, was postponed another year. Then the proposal was renewed by the Liberals, both in the Chamber and through the medium of such Liberal papers as the *Nationale*; but the attempt met with great opposition, as did a similar effort a few years ago.

That Benjamin died poor was due partly to his deplorable gambling habits, but partly also to the necessity he was under, by the terms of agreement made just before his father's death, of providing for Marianne and her children—that "clandestine posterity" to which he whimsically referred. As long as Marianne lived, he paid her a pension, which increased as her children grew up and had greater needs. Her son Charles, who resembled his father, both physically and morally, was always a problem to the family—changeable, obstinate and indifferent, unstable in his business occupations, disposed to be lazy and to accumulate debts. When Benjamin was made Deputy, Charles threatened to make a scandal for him by putting forward unwarranted money claims which would have furnished Benjamin's political opponents with convenient charges against him, but which were happily forestalled. Louise de Constant, the sister, on the other hand, was a bright and attractive young woman, and when in 1816 she married the Baron d'Estournelles, whom Benjamin considered a "brave soldier and an excellent match," he gladly gave her a dot of 1000 crowns. But all these expenses drained his purse and made him more dependent upon Charlotte's resources.

1834–45 In November 1834 Rosalie de Constant died, and her brother Charles died soon after the visit to Charlotte referred to above. Charlotte returned finally to Germany to make her home with her son, Baron Marenholz, who had become a widower, and lived there until her death in 1845. Her grandchildren recalled her as a "lively and cheery old lady," but she had a tragic end, for her cap-strings having caught fire in some manner, she died from the burns she received. Benjamin had left no posterity, so the little fourteen-year old son of Louise d'Estournelles petitioned the courts to be allowed to add the name of his illustrious uncle to his own, and, as Louis Benjamin Léon Ballust d'Estournelles de Constant, has handed down to a later generation the ideals of peace and liberty which Benjamin Constant de Rebecque so earnestly endeavoured to establish.

For fourteen years the memory of the man who had been so abused and misrepresented in his lifetime was permitted to rest in peace. Then, in 1844, the graceful and brilliant author of the *Causeries du Lundi* revived the slumbering scandals, in an article on Mme. de Charrière in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. All the sensational stories and violent passions that political animosities had bred were revived, and a heated contest developed, in which Mme. Récamier's friends rushed to the rescue of her old admirer. Sainte-Beuve was not silenced, but pursued Constant, says Faguet, "like a dog after his prey." Loménie, the champion of the lady of Abbaye-aux-Bois, responded at her request with a flattering portrait of Constant representing him as without fault or blemish, which was equally wide of the mark. Sainte-Beuve, in a note added to a later edition of the *Causeries*, retracted in a measure, but the impression he had made upon the public mind by his earlier attack was too vivid to be erased, and Constant, the fearless and persistent exponent of the sovereignty of the people and the rights of the individual, was submerged in the vacillating, erotic, disillusioned *Adolphe*.

Béranger also, who loved no one, least of all Constant, has, in *Ma Biographie*, given Constant's critics a cue which they have used skilfully:

"This illustrious publicist offered as much changeableness and inconsistency in his conduct as, with a few exceptions, he displayed talent and courage and perseverance in the principles of enlightened liberty, in the Tribune and in most of his writings. Such was the skill of his rhetoric that, given an accessible platform and a press which was in any degree free, he would, I believe,

have made himself acceptable to all the governments; but that was merely the fault of an intellect which loved to make sport of difficulties, and which regarded the applause it attained as triumphs for its cause. I think I could perceive that obstacles which were put in the way of free expression of thought by restrictive laws were an indispensable stimulus to this writer—the most subtly spiritual of wits whom I have ever known. Never has conversation appeared to me to possess so much grace, so much sprightliness, such flexibility and such apparent frankness as his."

Upon this same paradox of a brave and talented but perverse and shallow cynic, Sainte-Beuve has elaborated with subtle malice:

"The whole of this so brilliant, so decorative, edifice was at bottom destitute of principles, of foundation; it was because the whole was built of a heap of dust and ashes, as we have seen. He passed his life in professing liberal political views without esteeming mankind: in professing religion without experiencing an emotion. He looked on always, with mocking aloofness, at the serious rôle which he was attempting to assume; the vaudeville of parody accompanied the *grande pièce* in an aside. . . . He has the sad honour of offering the most perfected type of this species of a contradictory nature at once sincere and deceitful, eloquent and arid, warm and apathetic, romantic and unpoetical, truly inexplicable, such as it is: than whom one could not cite a more distinguished or rarer example."

The publication of Constant's Journal and of his letters to his family, by its revelation of his relations to Mme. de Staël, heightened the unfavourable impression created by such one-sided estimates as these, and, as Rudler says, "retarded his future by one hundred years," notwithstanding the endeavours of such political historians as Louandre and Laboulaye to reinstate him. Even Faguet cannot avoid the temptation to paradox:

"A Liberal who is not an optimist; a sceptic who advocates a most imperious and dogmatic system; a man without any religious sentiment, who was writing throughout his life a book on religion, destined to restore it to honour; a man of very feeble morality, who built his entire political system on the respect for moral law; and at the same time, a man of marvellous rectitude of thought, linked with extraordinary vacillation in conduct; almost a great man as to intelligence, almost a child as to will, almost below the average in never having known what he wanted; infinitely above the average in having realized exactly what he thought; a rare occurrence."

So too, Maurice Barrès, more sympathetic, but painting him with the brush of the impressionist, sees him as the "Romantique Solitaire," cloaking a "mad Bohemianism of the imagination under his disdainful mien," and "living in the dust of his disenchantment without ever once breathing nature"; finding his "supreme luxury in the ironical contemplation of his own subtle and wretched soul."

Benjamin, who was never weary of analysing his own idiosyncrasies, would assuredly have revelled in some of these piquant portraits. His description of himself at the age of twenty-five, indeed, might easily have given his enemies the weapon they used so cruelly.

"Blasé about everything, tired of everything, bitter, egotistical, with a kind of sensibility which serves merely to torture me, mobile to the degree of passing for a fool, subject to fits of melancholy, which overturn all my plans," etc.

Equally unsparing is the self-revelation of the *Journal Intime*, but the mistake lies in taking him too literally, or in assuming that what was but a passing mood, one out of myriads which flitted through his impressionable soul, was the real man. Rudler understands him better:

"There are some men who pride themselves on being completely and always themselves—such are Joseph de Maistre and Royer-Collard. Their life is rectilinear. The nervous, *svelte* and delicate Constant is not of this tribe; from month to month, from day to day, from hour to hour, his surfaces vary. His letters, his words, his gestures, betray the mood of the moment. He reflects with miraculous facility the colour of the time, the environment, the circumstances, of the author he is assiduously reading, of the correspondent to whom he is writing."

It must have been in recognition of this very quality that Constant wrote in his *History of Religions*:

"All the passions have in them something mysterious and contradictory. Ordinary argument cannot explain any of them satisfactorily. Love, that exclusive preference for an object we had for a long time been perfectly able to do without, and whom so many others resemble; the craving for glory, that thirst for fame which will outlast us; the enjoyment we find in self-denial, that enjoyment so contrary to the habitual instincts of our nature; melancholy, that sadness which has no cause, in whose depths lurks a pleasure which defies analysis . . . are inexplicable by the tests of logic."

"Others have misunderstood me," he wrote in the Journal; "I ought not to blame them, for I have misunderstood myself!" Benjamin was perfectly able to get outside of one of his contradictory "selves" and study it from the standpoint of the other; the only one who was able to see and compare them both at once was Rosalie, with her unusual combination of stern commonsense with delicate discernment and tenderness. Knowing as she did the Constant psychology, and the peculiar environment and education to which her cousin had been subjected, she could point out to those who called him heartless and indifferent that his apparent coldness was but a shield which nature had thrown out for the protection of that sensitive craving for affection and passionate devotion to those who caressed him, which had been such a marked characteristic of his childhood. In the man's changeableness and inconstancy, she perceived the same effervescing activity of mind and spirit which drove the child to perpetual quest of a new outlet for energy, new fields of thought and interest. With a mother's tenderness she wrote of him, when he had attained manhood, and the promise of his youth seemed doomed to be unfulfilled:

"I understand that it would be difficult to apologize for a life so agitated, so filled with political happenings and amorous episodes; but with such intense passions, such unfavourable circumstances, and a little weakness in the character, it is possible to be forced into a direction very different from that which the heart and the mind would have chosen. With a superior mind and good principles, it is possible to return to the position one was always destined to occupy. That is what is to be hoped for Benjamin. His manhood and his old age will make reparation for the agitations of his youth, and his reputation as a virtuous man and a distinguished writer will establish themselves."

And if Rosalie is open to the charge of maternal partiality for her cousin, another testimony to the depth and intensity of his nature is offered by Louandre:

"The entire life of Benjamin Constant was a struggle between his heart and his reason. He passed abruptly from outbursts of the most violent affection, to disenchantment; from enthusiasm to disillusion. After having feared he was being duped, he became afraid of having been cruel. . . . A rare nature, . . . accessible to every affectionate sentiment, he easily allowed himself to be led into exaggerations of passion. But he quickly perceived that passion gives only in happiness what it also gives in pain, and scepticism [followed], . . . the reaction of a great mind which is forced back upon itself, after having vainly sought the ideal of which it dreamed."

His intense individualism shrank from any invasion of his moods or his rights, and the attempt to extract affection, as he has told us himself, always drove him in the contrary direction. Yet he never ceased to reiterate that to think and to love were his sole resources. Like Sir Willoughby Pattern, he says: "I must have a heart which loves me and an idea to absorb me." As a child the thought that any one could be annoyed with him or disapprove of him "pursued him like a spectre." It did not suffice for him to be satisfied with himself; he must have the commendation of others. When he reached adolescence this need of love and approbation had to be satisfied at any cost; if it was denied, he threatened to kill himself; if it was thrust upon him, or made demands upon him in return, he rejected it. This is the theme of *Adolphe*, and in this respect he becomes a kind of Don Juan, without, however, the cruelty or the systematic cultivation of love as a fine art. "I had not, however, the depth of egotism that such a character appears to imply," he writes in *Adolphe*. "While being interested only in myself, my interest in myself was but feeble. I bore in the depths of my heart a need of emotion, of which I was not aware, but which, finding nothing to satisfy it, detached me successively from all objects which in turn attracted my curiosity."

The egotism which in childhood made him so dependent upon the approbation of his friends, and in adolescence craved a love which never could be satisfied, assumed in mature life the guise of a thirst for popularity. When visiting Béranger in prison he confessed that could he possess the poet's popularity with the people he would willingly endure his punishment. "As to popularity, I love it, I court it, I enjoy it with ecstasy," he wrote him. Three years before his death he still had the craving for fame. He had kept, he wrote Rosalie, but one of the visions of his youth, that of leaving behind him a name, a celebrity. Thureau-Dangin thinks his love of popularity prompted his zeal for Liberalism: a strange motive, considering the abuse it brought him! If there was one thing in which he sincerely and unchangingly believed, and for which he struggled because he could not do otherwise, it was Individual Liberty. "I may keep back the facts, but I never simulate any sentiment," he said. Politically the sincerity of his aims was unquestionable, though he might stoop to manipulate the means of attaining them—a device not peculiar to him in the world of statesmanship. Never, at all events, did he stoop to sacrifice one of the principles for which he stood to any petty personal calculations. "It might be said," wrote Duvergier, with

perfect dispassionateness, "that Benjamin Constant was not sincere, and that he contradicted in secret councils the council he gave to his fellow-citizens publicly. We think differently. He is open to many reproaches, and there is in his political life more than one stain which the most kindly henchman cannot efface; but we owe to him this justice, that he was always sincerely the friend of Constitutional Liberty, and the partisan of legal resistance, as far as this resistance was possible."

Another penalty of this dual personality of his, which has so often been remarked upon, and of the remarkable analytical bent of his mental processes, was his ability to see all sides of a question, or subject, himself included; so that he was unable to determine which one was the best to adopt. Thence that vacillation which must take refuge in inaction or allows itself to be guided entirely by circumstance—or "destiny," as Benjamin preferred to call it. "Indecision is the torment of my life!" he cries more than once; "it is only Will that is lacking in order to be happy." Which shall he choose: Politics or Literature? Society or Solitude? Switzerland or Germany? Mme. de Staël or Charlotte? Austerity or Self-indulgence? Activity or Idleness? . . . He never wholly surrenders to either, helpless before the arguments in favour of each. "It is necessary that some passion seize me, that a dominating idea shall take possession of me and become a passion," he says. The very obstinacy in him, which people take for decision, is, he confesses, merely the result of his indecision born of his vanity, his fear of criticism and the conviction that once having yielded to blind impulse he must go on as he has begun, regardless of consequences. So it was in the case of Jenny Pourrat; so it was with his allegiance to Bernadotte; so it was with that fatal letter to Napoleon; and so it was with the unsatisfactory course of life on which he found himself drifting:

"To-day I have been sorting my papers, which always plunges me into profound dejection. How many ties I have severed! What a crazy mania for independence and for isolation has dominated my life, and by what still crazier weakness do I still remain the most independent man alive! There is *nothing to do but follow to the end* this life which I have conducted so foolishly. At least I have always had the wit to keep it serious and intact in the eyes of others: no one suspects the kind of folly which inundates and devastates it." (*Journal Intime.*)

Some one wrote of George Meredith: "What is terrible about him is that he feels it as a poet and stands aside from it as an ironic

showman." When it is not other people, but one's own inner life that is analysed, when one is keenly sensible of the war of *egos* within him, and yet unable to sacrifice any one of the infinite series of possibilities in order to concentrate on a single line of development, the situation is even more tragic. It has been pointed out that the following passage, referring to Schopenhauer, might equally be written about Constant :

" He has experienced the blessedness of a life of pure intellect . . . very deeply . . . the more deeply . . . on account of the contrast between the intellectual side of his nature and his restless, unhappy emotional life. . . . There were times when he experienced happy hours, pursuing his thoughts, free from all desires. . . . But then, at other times, the beasts which seemed to have been entirely tamed rose up again and destroyed his peace. . . . He was helpless against them. *It is a curious fact that the clearest knowledge of the perverseness of the human will can produce no change.*"

The value of such sensitive natures as Constant's cannot be gauged by the tangible results they attained. They touch experiences on so many sides ; they evoke sympathetic response from dim and seldom-visited recesses of the human heart. They cannot be weighed in the scales of rectitude or efficiency. Rather are they the mirror in which we perceive and interpret the curious conflicts within ourselves, and thus learn tolerance and gentleness for the mistakes of our brothers. And after we have said all we can about Constant, explained and excused, praised and admired, and have attempted to reconcile his contradictions and his vacillations, he still remains charming, inscrutable, unique ; he baffles the psychologist, he defies the biographer.

LETTERS, JOURNALS, AND WORKS OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT CONSULTED

LETTERS (MANUSCRIPT)

Bequeathed by Charles de Constant to the Bibliothèque de Genève, 1835, with the stipulation that they should not be published until 1860.

Dos. 35.—Seven early letters from Benjamin to his Grandmother, and miscellaneous early manuscripts. (Also three notices of his death, one by Coulmann.)

Dos. 34.—Letters of Benjamin to Samuel and Charles de Constant.

Dos. 36.—Letters of Benjamin to Mme. de Nassau and to Rosalie (with several from Mme. de Constant).

Dos. 16, 18.—Correspondence of Charles and Rosalie de Constant.

Dos. 30, 31, 33.—Correspondence of Samuel and Rosalie de Constant and Mme. de Staël.

Many of these letters, especially of those from Benjamin, have been published—first by Crépet (*Revue Nationale*, 1867) and then by Menos, Rudler and a few by Achard. (See Bibliography.)

LETTERS (PUBLISHED)

1. *To Madame de Charrière.*—Published by Godet, by Mme. Meligan and by Rudler (see Bibliography). Selections were published by Gaullieur in *La Bibliothèque Universelle de Genève*[1] (1847 and 1848), and by Sainte-Beuve (see Bibliography). (Most of the originals owned by M. Godet.)
2. *To Villers.*—Published by Isler, 1879 (see Bibliography). (Originals in the Library of Hambourg.)
3. *To Mme. Récamier.*—Published by Mme. Lenormant, 1881 (see Bibliography). (Originals in possession of the author.)
4. *To Constant's Maternal Aunts.*—Published by Meligari, 1895. (Originals in the family Loys-Chandieu.)
5. *To Hochet.*—Published (in part) in *La Revue*, May 1 and 15, 1904, by Georges de Lauris. (Originals owned by M. Maurice ed Mieulle.)

[1] Republished by Meligari, with the *Journal Intime*.

6. *To Fauriel* (1802–1804).—Published, 1906, by Glachant (see Bibliography). (Originals in the Bibliothèque de l'Institut.)
7. *To Barante* (1805–1830).—Published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* —July 15 and August 1, 1906. (Originals belong to M. le Baron de Barante.)
8. *To Böttiger* (1804–1814).—Published by M. Fernand Baldensperger, 1908 (see Bibliography). (Originals in Royal Library at Dresden.)
9. *To Wilhelm and Salomon de Sévery*.—Published by M. W. de Sévery in *La Vie de Société* (see Bibliography). (Originals in de Sévery Archives.)

Letters to which the Author has not had access except in selections.

Letters to Ferdinand and Thérèse Huber, unpublished, are owned by Professor Ludwig Geiger of Berlin.

Letters to Coulmann (1823–1830), published in Coulmann's *Reminiscences*, vol. iii. (a rare volume, out of print). Selections in Sainte-Beuve, *Nouveaux Lundis*.

JOURNALS

Le Cahier Rouge—"Ma Vie," 1767–1787.—Autobiography, first published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1907, January 1 and 15; in book form, Calmann-Lévy, 1907. (Original belongs to a descendant of Constant's uncle, David d'Hermenches.)

Journal Intime.[1]—Published 1887 (in part) in *La Revue Internationale* (January, February, March), 1887, and in book form in 1895 by Meligari (see Bibliography). (Original in possession of descendants of David d'Hermenches.)

Carnet.[2]—A notebook, given by Constant to his secretary shortly before his death, and now lost. Extracts published by Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits Littéraires*, vol. iii., and in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, February 1833.

Les Cahiers Verts.—4 vols. (manuscript). Notebooks and journals of Rosalie de Constant, owned by Mlle. Achard and published in part by her in her biography of Rosalie.

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[1] Constant's literary remains passed upon his wife's death to his half-brother, Charles de Rebecque de Constant, and his half-sister, Louise d'Estournelles de Constant. The former appears to have ceded or sold the most important manuscripts in his share to the grandsons of Constant's uncle, David d'Hermenches.

[2] On November 29, 1813, Constant wrote to Mme. de Nassau, "I have (in Göttingen) an account book of all my expenses since 1795, which I kept because it served me as a journal."

WORKS

De l'Esprit de Conquête et de l'Usurpation, dans leurs rapports avec la Civilization Européene. 3ième édition. Paris, 1814.

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